

Individualized Behavioral Treatment of Blood-Injection-Injury Phobia and Avoidance of Medical Procedures in Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disorders: A Single Case Design Study

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**Team Project Abstract
2016-2017**

Background: Anxiety disorders are observed more frequently in individuals with autism in contrast to typically developing individuals, who are more able to express and respond to reassurance or other cognitive approaches. Individuals with autism who have difficulties with communication may react to fear-inducing stimuli with avoidance and sometimes even aggressive or self-injurious behavior. These disruptive behaviors may interfere with medical procedures or delay diagnosing medical conditions, and can result in the inability to monitor chronic conditions. Review of previous single-case studies for avoidance in individuals with developmental disabilities targeted avoidance of stimuli such as dogs, strangers, and animatronics. All of the studies used treatment components based on behavior analysis and/or behavioral psychology. These components included exposure to approximations of a stimulus and reinforcement of approach, sometimes with fear hierarchies and prompting, and utilized strategies that targeted only observable and objective data.

Objectives: The present study will develop and test individualized treatment for adults with autism, combining exposure/habituation with single-case design methodology to treat avoidance of medical procedures. Results will contribute to the literature of

treatment of medical anxiety for individuals with autism, since no standard protocol or framework exists to develop treatments for this heterogeneous group, with widely varying presentations of avoidance. Results are aimed to determine the effectiveness of individualized treatment across several individuals.

Methods: This project is a “treatment as usual” single case study design for adults 18 years or older with autism at the Behavioral Psychology Department and the Westchester Institute for Human Development (WIHD) who are being treated for needle phobia and/or avoidance of medical procedures. Data collection will take place via live collection or videotaped sessions. Objective data will be collected dependent upon the specific variables related to medical avoidance (challenging behavior, degree of avoidance). Target behavior(s) for each individual will be identified and operationally defined, and will likely include common avoidance behaviors such as yelling, elopement, and aggressive behaviors. Progress will be measured using the presence of a challenging behavior corresponding with progress across a task list based on the individual’s current levels of avoidance, as well as their desired treatment outcome. Consistent with previous studies, duration or frequency of observable behaviors will be recorded and used to track progress across treatment.

Progress to Date: The IRB for this study has been submitted and has recently received full approval. Data collection will begin pending recruitment of participants and initiation of treatment.

Next Steps: The present study aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of a general framework for developing a treatment to target goal of completing blood draws in adults with autism spectrum disorder. This methodology will be used to recommend a process for conducting and measuring treatment progress in avoidance of medical procedures. Recruitment for study participants is currently in progress.