



## Parental Perception of Certified Child Life Specialist Integration During Preventive Dental Visits for Children with SHCN

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### BACKGROUND

- Children with special health care needs (SHCN) frequently experience procedural distress during dental care, contributing to barriers in care access and continuity of preventive services.
- This study evaluates parental perception of Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) involvement during preventive dental visits and its perceived impact on child distress and future access

### METHODS

- English-speaking parents or legal guardians of children aged ≥4 years with SHCN and concomitant documented need for CCLS were recruited when presenting for a preventive dental care visit. Children with prior CCLS involvement during preventive visits were excluded. Parents completed pre- and post-visit surveys administered via Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap).
- Parents retrospectively rated child distress during a previous preventive visit without CCLS using a 0-100 Visual Analog Scale (VAS) with higher scores indicating more distress and identified goals for the current visit. Parental perception was assessed using:
  - Proportion of visit goals achieved
  - Likelihood requesting CCLS for future visits
  - Frequency and types of CCLS interventions used
  - Perceived distress using the 0-100 VAS

### RESULTS

Table 1: Patient Demographics

#### Age (years) at time of dental visit

Median (Q1, Q3)

Overall  
(N=22)

9.79 (7.44, 11.5)

#### Ethnicity

Hispanic or Latino

5 (22.7%)

Not Hispanic or Latino

16 (72.7%)

Unknown

1 (4.5%)

#### Race

American Indian/Alaska Native

1 (4.5%)

Asian

0 (0%)

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

1 (4.5%)

Black or African American

7 (31.8%)

White

10 (45.5%)

More Than One Race

1 (4.5%)

Unknown

2 (9.1%)

#### Sex

Female

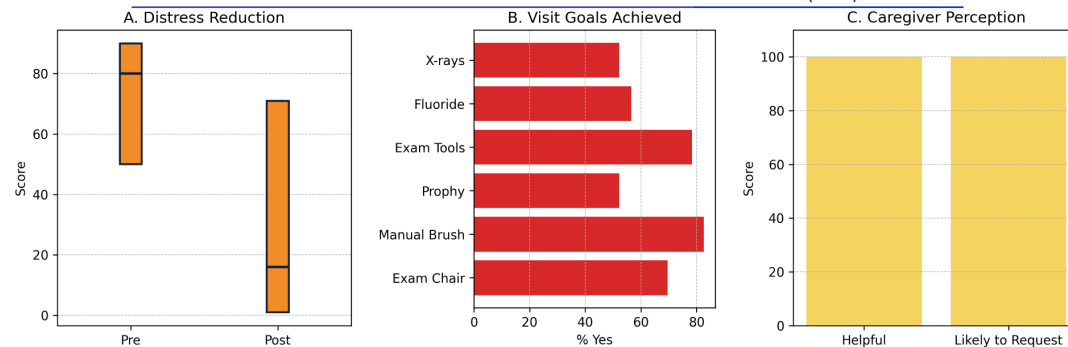
12 (54.5%)

Male

9 (40.9%)

Unknown

1 (4.5%)



### CONCLUSIONS

- Integration of CCLS in preventive dental visits for children with SHCN was associated with a statistically significant decrease in parental reported perceived distress in their children, a generally high rate of procedure completion for some procedures and a generally favorable perception of CCLS. Overall strong parental endorsement of future CCLS involvement was found.
- Findings support the clinical value of interdisciplinary behavioral support in enhancing the preventive dental experience for vulnerable pediatric populations.

### IMPLICATIONS

- Findings highlight the value of Child Life support for pediatric dental patients with SHCN to reduce barriers in care access and preventive services. Future research is merited to explore the components of Child Life support that may be adaptable or translatable to other providers
- Access to CCLS services may be limited in some pediatric dental settings; however, the therapeutic principles central to child life practice, including preparation, coping facilitation, and caregiver support are important to families and increased exposure to CCLS techniques in pediatric dental training has potential benefits.

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