

Increasing Comfort for Providers and Patients

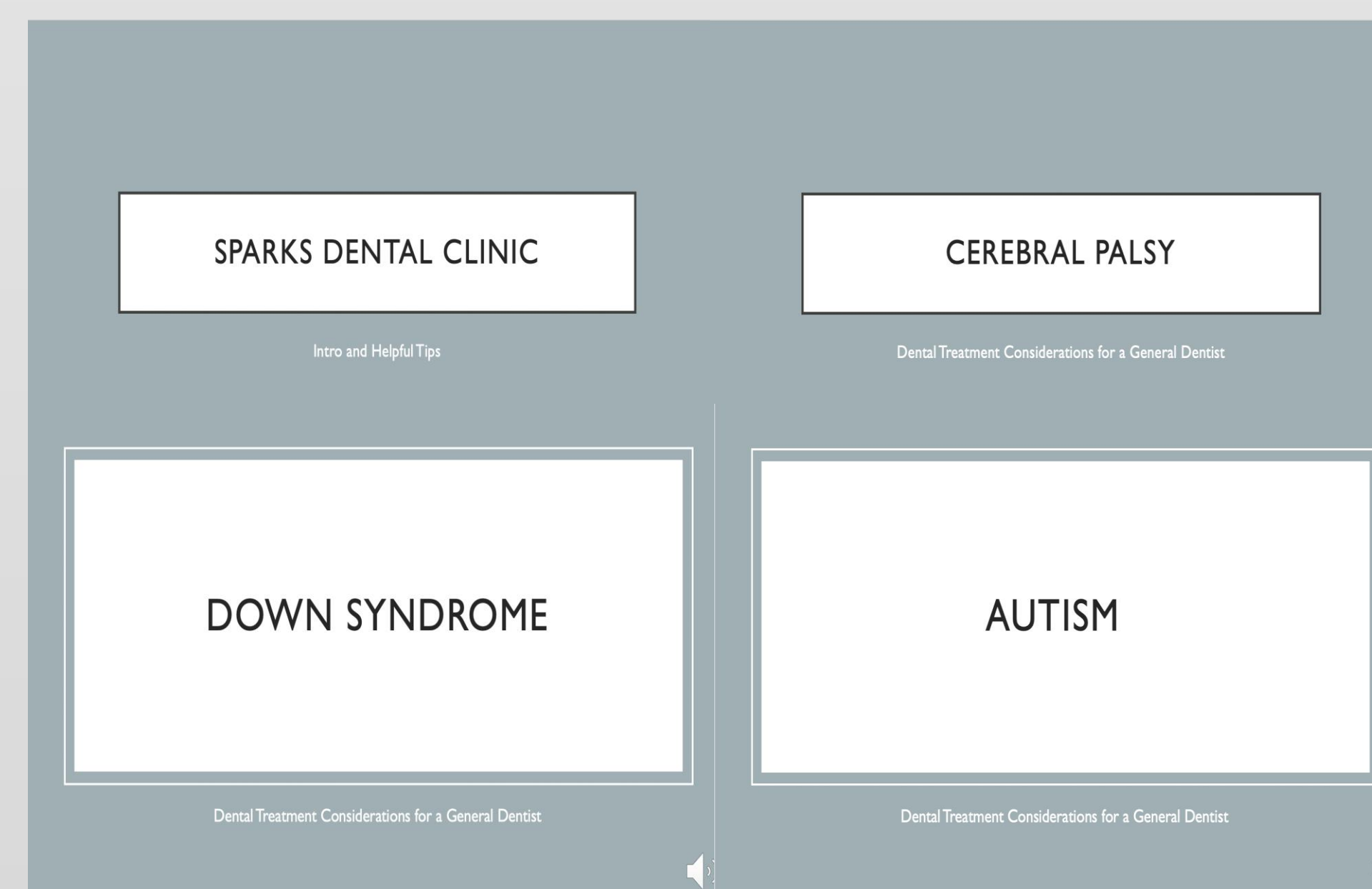
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Introduction

In general, patients with special needs have higher rates of periodontal disease and dental caries than the general population. They also experience other dental conditions such as erosion, GERD, and bruxism. Because of this, it is important that these patients are being seen by a dentist regularly. Along with dental considerations, they have extensive medical histories that should be considered prior to dental treatment including seizures, and certain heart conditions. Approximately 30% of dentists see no or few patients with special needs in their practice. Within this percentage, reasons cited include: Offices not properly equipped, dentists and staff not feeling properly trained to meet the needs of these patients, and concerns about medical and pharmacological considerations with patients with special needs.

Impact

Our goal with this project was to increase current dental students comfort level when treating patients with special needs. Throughout this year, we have gained and compiled knowledge and experience in treating patients with autism, cerebral palsy, and down syndrome. From this, we have created a series of lectures involving these patient populations that will be distributed by UAB School of Dentistry to 85-100 dental students per year moving forward. Additionally, we constructed a video social story that will be made available to the patients of Sparks Dental Clinic by uploading it to the homepage of their website.



Left: Title slides of the lectures created by Carolyn Grace and Jenai that will be distributed to the incoming D3 class in the fall. Right: Carolyn Grace and Jenai outside of their project site, Sparks Dental Clinic

Logic Model

Outcomes

- We focused on a dual approach to meet this need, we wanted:
- Current dental students to receive additional instruction prior to their Sparks Clinic rotation beginning in Fall 2022, thereby raising their awareness and confidence of treating patients with intellectual disabilities
 - Current patients and caregivers to have an additional tool to feel more comfortable prior to coming to their appointment

Outputs

- By April 1, 2022, UAB School of Dentistry will have access to online learning modules centered around patient care for special needs patients, with the plan to offer it to ~85 students in academic year 2022-23.
- By April 1, 2022, Current patients and caregivers at Sparks Dental Clinic will have access to a video social story to use as a tool to feel more comfortable prior to coming to their dental appointments.

Activities

- Shadowed and assisted at Sparks Dental Clinic to acquire knowledge and experience about treating patients with special needs.
- Scripted, filmed, and edited a video social story to be distributed to patients and caregivers at Sparks dental clinic.
- Created, edited, and recorded four lectures to be presented to future classes at UAB School of Dentistry as they begin to treat patients with special needs.

Inputs

- Over 65 hours of shadowing time at Sparks Dental Clinic
- Over 30 hours of Mentor Expertise and planning sessions.
- Over 90 hours of planning, administrative, and creative work used to construct a curriculum for future dental students as well as a video for patients.
- Over 15 hours of filming and research to create these tools.

Critical Assessment

During this year, we had to adapt our project idea multiple times. After mapping out our ideal project, we began shadowing in Sparks and realized that our “ideal” didn’t necessarily equal our “real.” We recognized our project would need to pivot so that we could have the greatest impact. Working together, and getting advice from our mentors and Kristin, we were able to get our project back on track and provide the duality of our project that we initially planned. An additional challenge was time management as we both started seeing our own patients this year and had multiple other responsibilities to juggle. We adapted to this by using time management and prioritization skills. We also learned quickly that we did not both have to have a hand in every aspect of our project, and that we could divide up work to get more achieved. This was especially helpful because trying to find substantial amounts of concurrent free time during this year was difficult. This required effective communication on our parts with each other as well as with our mentors. Ultimately, in addition to educating ourselves more on special patient care, we learned a lot about leadership, adaptability, time management, and working together throughout this fellowship. We also had the bonus of improvement in our skills in lecture creation, PowerPoint, video editing and filming. These lessons and skills are what we will take with us out into our future endeavors where we hope to continue to inspire others to give back to our communities.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to our site mentor, Dr. Mitchell, and our academic mentor, Dr. Robles, for guiding us through our project. Thank you to Sparks Dental Clinic for allowing us to shadow, assist, and utilize your clinic for experience working with patients with special needs to gain knowledge throughout the year. Thank you to Mrs. Boggs for always being there as a sounding board, to lend helping hand, and to offer advice when we hit walls in our project.