

Banner Urgent Care and Pal to help pediatric patients with autism, other special needs

Interactive website and digital tools make doctor visit less scary

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PHOENIX (Feb. 14, 2019) -- For many children, a visit to urgent care is scary but for children with special needs, it can be almost terrifying.

Banner Children's Urgent Care is teaming up with Pal Experiences, a Phoenix-based company that provides digital tools to support special-needs children, to take the "scary" out of a trip to the urgent care for pediatric patients who may already be dealing with autism, anxiety and other developmental disabilities.

More and more children are faced with those challenges. One in 64 eight-year-olds in Arizona are now identified as having autism spectrum disorder, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

Through a pilot program, Banner Children's Urgent Care in Gilbert and Tempe now offer custom digital tools and a video story kids can watch to prepare for their visit. The video stars a young boy getting breathing treatment for his flu-like symptoms, and a seven-year-old girl who is getting a splint for a sprained wrist. [It can be viewed here.](#)

"For all kids, and particularly those with special needs, uncertainty may invite fear, anger, anxiety and / or self-stimulation when encountering new experiences," said Rena Szabo, MD, Banner's Psychology director.

"Providing an individual with intellectual or developmental disabilities with a video of what to expect when going to a Banner Children's Urgent Care is empowering for patients and families. Ultimately this type of inclusive 'practice' experience is empowering for the patient and can be a foundation for building good medical experiences that last a lifetime."

Allison Moreno, mother of Lillyana, 7, who is being treated for connective tissue disease, couldn't agree more for the need to help prepare children for an urgent care visit.

"As a parent, when a physician says Lillyana needs this test or that to determine a diagnosis or treatment, I understand that," says Moreno, who is also a zone manager for Banner Urgent Care. "I can even tell her there's a really big machine and it's going to make a noise and might seem scary, but it's not going to hurt. She may listen a little bit, but all she's going to know for sure is that she's scared. For kids who have special needs or are routinely visiting specialists, those negative things get ingrained in their heads from the start."

Lillyana has made countless trips to doctors treating her connective tissue disease and other chronic disorders. Although these visits have become somewhat routine for Lillyana and her mom, they're still nerve-wracking.

"If someone like Lillyana can watch a video showing another kid like them going underneath that machine or sitting in that doctor's chair and they're not crying and they're not scared, she's going to be like, 'Ok if they can do it, I'm fine,'" says Moreno, who has more than 15 years' experience in the medical field. "I think that not just for my daughter but for any little one, it's going to make them feel empowered."

To create their digital tools, Pal uses video modeling along with other best-practices in behavioral therapy to help reduce anxiety over new experiences, identify potential sensory sensitivities, and offer alternative communication methods. These tools were designed specifically to assist individuals with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities, but they have been found to be helpful for people of all abilities.

The new tools can be accessed free of charge at PalExperiences.org. Banner Children's Urgent Care is also considering expanding the program to additional locations.

For Allison and Lillyana, the experience of being in the video and watching it has already had benefits.

"Even though she's been to specialist after specialist since she was three years old, all these little things from the movie are sticking out in her head now that she never mentioned before," Moreno says. "It's been super

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empowering for her, and she's had a little more pep in her step. She's got a little more confidence. I don't think it could have turned out better. Something as simple as a video is just going to do so much good... so much good."

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About Banner Urgent Care

Banner Urgent Care provides a close, convenient and affordable treatment option for patients with non-life threatening illnesses and injuries such as cold and flu; ear, eye and throat infections; fevers; skin rashes; and sprains, strains and lacerations. Banner Urgent Care is open every day of the year and accepts most insurance plans. For more information, locations and hours of operation, please visit www.BannerHealth.com/urgentcare.

About Pal Experiences

Pal creates digital tools that connect individuals and families impacted by autism, anxiety and other developmental disabilities with businesses inspired to offer them a better customer experience. Pal is a Phoenix-based startup social enterprise with a vision of developing a vast network of "Pal Place" partners in entertainment, hospitality, education, healthcare, and beyond. Other Pal Places include Flower Child restaurants, OdySea Aquarium and Butterfly Wonderland, the Arizona Science Center, the Arizona Diamondbacks, the Children's Museum of Phoenix, the Phoenix Suns, and more. Learn more at PalExperiences.org, and connect with Pal on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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