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Shiley Surgery Center's Pediatric Surgical Cap Project

By Kirsten Thomas RN, CNOR

At Shiley Surgery Center, we are privileged to be able to care for a wide variety of pediatric surgical patients. We perform many types of surgeries on our pediatric population including corneal transplant, cataract surgery, and strabismus surgery. Many of these infants and children require multiple surgeries and become part of our Surgery Center "family". Our staff enjoys being able to work and interact with the babies, toddlers, and older



children that come to our facility.

Working with young patients comes with its own set of challenges. Our staff is trained on age specific competencies and new employees are oriented to the specifics of working with the pediatric surgical population. One of the challenges we encounter with our young patients is preoperative surgical anxiety. We are continuously looking for ways to reduce this anxiety, often in a creative manner. Sometimes we sing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" to children as they are drifting under anesthesia. We also try letting the patients pick a sweet smelling lip

balm that is placed on the inside of their anesthetic mask. We allow them to bring a "comfort" item into surgery which is usually a stuffed animal or blanket. All of these are simple things to do, but they have a dramatic effect in providing a distraction and easing our little patient's anxiety.

I read an article in a nursing magazine about a program that a pediatric surgical nurse started at her hospital to help decrease their patients' preoperative anxiety. She called it "Sew Angelic" and started making homemade surgical caps for her patients that they could wear in surgery and then take home with them. This sounded like such a great project that I decided to write the nurse who started the program in order to get more information. She sent me the template they used for the small surgical caps. I felt that this was a creative way that could benefit our little patients and give them something

to smile about before surgery. After contacting UCSD's Volunteer Services and explaining what I wanted to achieve, they enthusiastically embraced the task of making pediatric surgical caps for us. The Shiley staff and our volunteers together supply the material for this project.

Now, when the children come in on the day of their surgery, we have a big bin filled with all types of surgical caps in many fun patterns. They are able to choose which one they want, put it on themselves, wear it to surgery, and then take it home with them. We also take a picture of them wearing the cap, and



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give it to the parents as a keepsake. I developed an evaluation tool that we used to determine our pediatric patients' anxiety preoperatively and whether or not the anxiety was mitigated through our surgical cap project. The data was collected over several months, with the results supporting the project's use as a distraction and means of reducing preoperative anxiety in children. This has been such a fun project. It is very fulfilling to see our young patients stop crying and start smiling when they are able to choose their own homemade surgical cap, put it on, and then "ham it up" for the camera.

At Shiley Surgery Center, we are always striving for ways to improve our patients' perioperative experience. Thanks to our staff, and our wonderful volunteers who have helped to make this surgical cap project successful, we have made another step towards our goal.