

Caring Through Play: Evaluating the Impact of a Teddy Bear Hospital on Children's Hospital Preparedness and Anxiety

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Introduction

- Children visit healthcare facilities for a variety of reasons, many of which can lead to negative associations with medical environments.
- Anxiety and fear can hinder cooperation with treatments and contribute to psychological distress such as heightened anxiety, aggression, regression, and difficulties in communication.
- The Teddy Bear Hospital program seeks to mitigate these challenges by incorporating elements of play and familiarity into the healthcare experience through role-play.
- Targeted primarily at young patients, the program allows children to bring their favorite stuffed animals into a mock hospital environment.
- By engaging in the roles of patient and caregiver, children are given the opportunity to understand and normalize medical procedures they may face, transforming a potentially intimidating experience into one of empowerment and reassurance.

Project Goals

- This interprofessional project aimed to:
- Increase children's hospital preparedness
 - Help to normalize and educate children on medical procedures
 - Reduce fear and anxiety related to medical procedures and interactions
 - Create a positive association with the health care setting



Intervention

A multidisciplinary team developed a Teddy Bear Hospital to familiarize children with healthcare environments through simulated clinical play.

Planning occurred over an eight-week period and included three planning meetings and one post-event debrief. Ongoing coordination occurred via Microsoft Teams communication.

The 3-hour event was held one week prior to the start of the public-school year. Children and families were encouraged to preregister, though walk-ins were accepted.

Participants brought stuffed animals to serve as "patients," with additional stuffed animals provided for adoption.

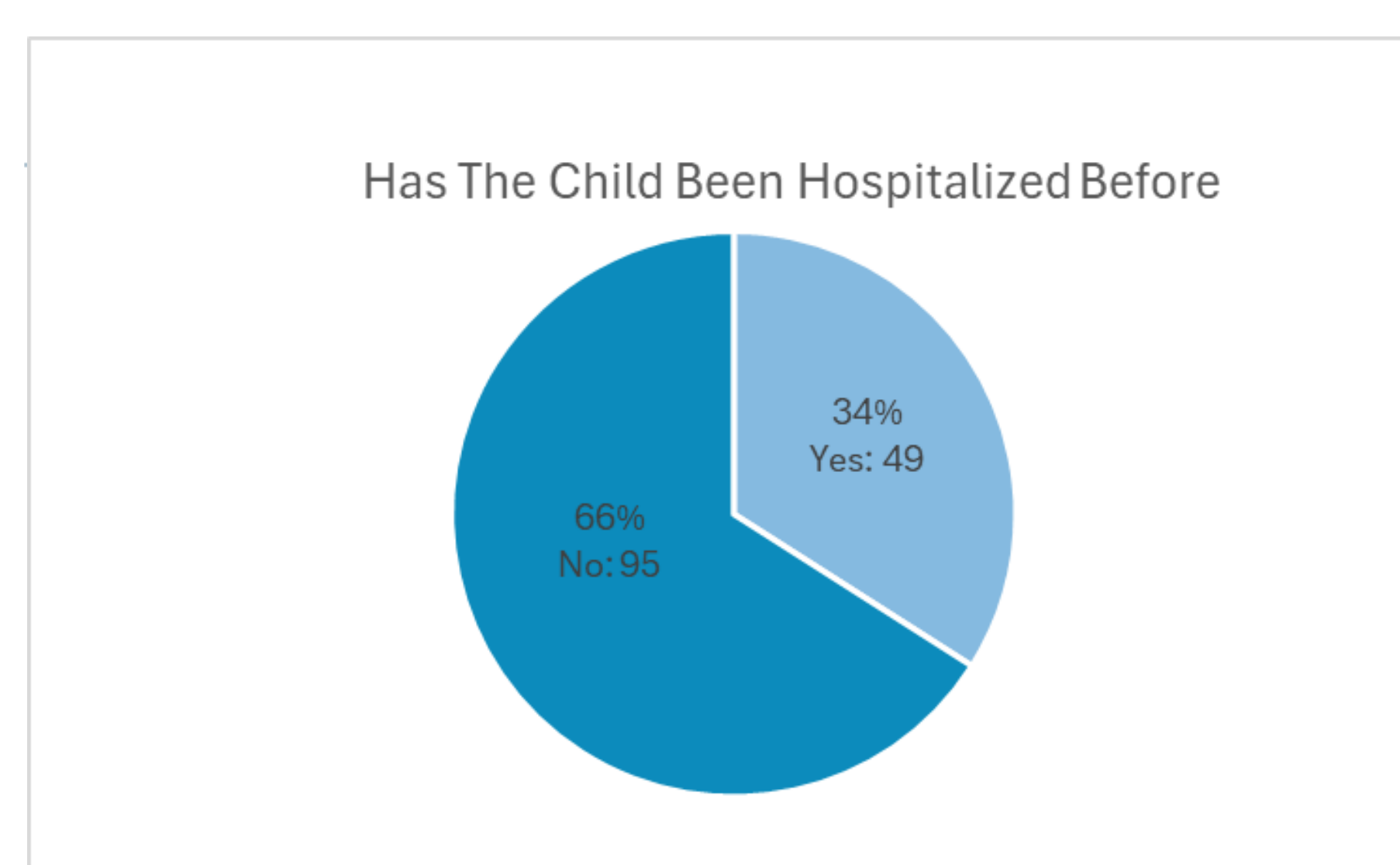
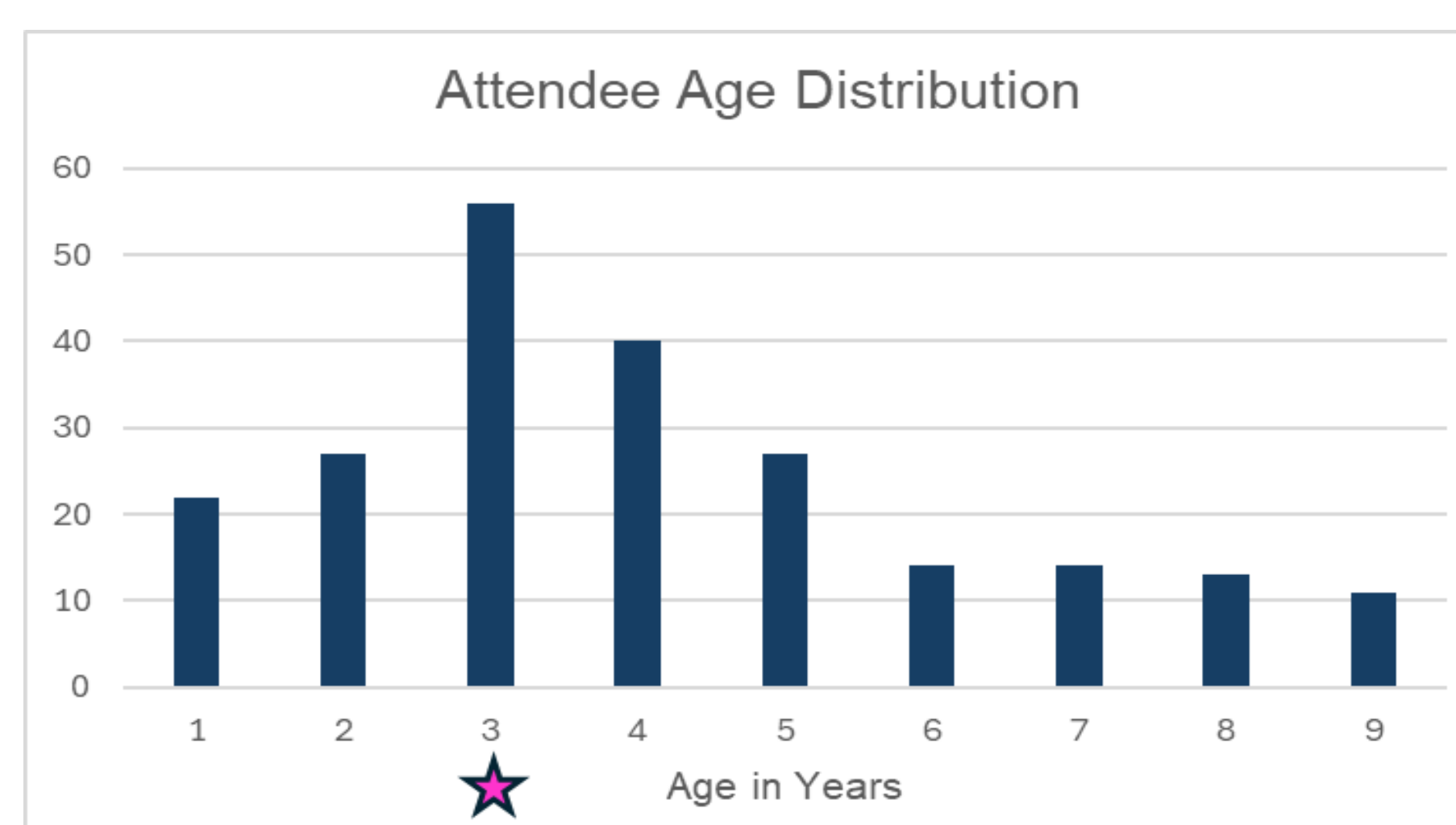
Children rotated through 10 interactive stations staffed by multidisciplinary volunteers to include but not limited to nurses, child life specialists, respiratory therapists, paramedics, physicians, radiology, and hospital staff.

Stations included check-in, vital signs, triage, examination, imaging, pharmacy, respiratory therapy, splinting, IV/blood work demonstration, an inside tour of the Inova Children's ambulance, and a healthy habits education booth.

Attendance was recorded at check-in, and family feedback was collected through a QR code survey. A post-event debrief session was conducted to evaluate program outcomes and identify areas for improvement.

Attendee Characteristics

- 223 children/families attended the Teddy Bear Hospital



Improvement

- 44 caregiver surveys were completed through a QR-code feedback tool.
- 100% of respondents reported their child felt more comfortable with healthcare environments following participation.
- 100% of families indicated they would attend the event again and recommend it to others.
- Open-ended responses highlighted that children particularly enjoyed the vital signs, IV demonstration, and splinting stations, noting the experience as both fun and educational.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Overall Experience	0%	0%	8.90%	91.10%
Friendliness of Staff	0%	0%	2.20%	97.80%
Activities and Stations	0%	0%	6.70%	93.30%
Educational Value for Your Children/Child	0%	0%	11.10%	88.90%
Organization of the Event	0%	7%	15.60%	77.80%
Cleanliness and Safety	0%	0%	11.10%	88.90%

Recommendations

- The Teddy Bear Hospital model has a meaningful impact on service by fostering positive early healthcare experiences, which may improve cooperation, communication, and overall patient interactions in clinical settings.
- 100% of caregivers reported increased comfort and positive perceptions, supporting its effectiveness in reducing anxiety.
- The program's successful expansion across multiple locations within a multi-site health system demonstrates its adaptability and potential for broader implementation.
- Ongoing efforts will focus on continued expansion across additional sites and establishing the program as an annual, sustainable community outreach event.
- Future directions include enhancing data collection, refining educational stations, and exploring long-term impact on patient outcomes.
- This model offers a low-cost, high-impact approach for broader implementation in pediatric settings.

References & Event Photos

Please scan the QR code for a full list of references.



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