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From Terrifying to Terrific: The Creative Journey of the Adventure Series

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"I had just finished designing a big MR scanner," Doug Dietz, the creator of the MR Adventure Discovery Series explained during the TED California Event. As an industrial designer, Dietz is in charge of the enclosures, controls and displays, coils and patient transfer. He was so excited to see his MR scanner in action that he ran to the hospital where it was being showcased to see.



A young patient was coming into the MR room to be scanned: "I see this young family coming down the hallway and I can tell as they get closer that the little girl is weeping. As they get even closer to me, I notice the father leans down and just goes 'remember we talked about this, you can be brave,'" says Dietz. As they walked into the MR suite, Dietz had the chance to see the room through the girl's eyes for the first time: "Everything was kind of like, beige" he said, describing what he calls 'crime scene' stickers (which tell patients where to go), and the exclamation mark warning sign on the door. "The room itself is kind of dark and has those flickering fluorescent lights" and adds "that machine that I had designed basically looked like a brick with a hole in it."

“The pilot rooms, which were showcased in the University of Pittsburgh Hospital, received incredible response. Download pictures (http://www.flickr.com/photos/gehealthcare/sets/72157629488755266/)

Dietz explained that MRIs made a terrible noise, and the little girl started to cry. "The parents are looking at each other and they don't have to say a word, because they don't know how they're going to get their child through this," he explained. Understanding that the environment where the scanning was done simply didn't work for younger children was a wakeup call. It was also a new challenge.



Solving the Problem with the Adventure Series

The engineer started from the knowledge that the anxiety curve for both children and parents start with finding out that the child has to have the scan. The anxiety is then exacerbated until they find themselves in the hospital, already upset by the time they see the scanner. The plan was simple: offer an environment that was so welcoming that children would feel like being scanned is an adventure and not a trial. To do so, they asked customers and children about what they would like during ideation sessions.

The pilot rooms, which were showcased in the University of Pittsburgh Hospital, received incredible response. In the variety of adventures, which include aromatherapy, calming decorations and in some cases, disco-ball bubbles, children are transported to another, more imaginative world where simple commands to get the scan done accurately become part of the adventure. In one of the Adventure Series, children have to get into a canoe, and are made to lie down inside. "They tell children to hold still so that they don't rock the boat, and if you really do hold still, the fish will start jumping over the top of you," Dietz explains.

In the Pirate Adventure, a visual transformation of the equipment that was available before, patients are on a dock. There is a shipwreck and some sand castles in the corner. Children then work on the plank to be scanned. The Coral City Adventure in the emergency room gives children an underwater experience. It has a disco ball that makes light like bubbles around the room; children get into a yellow submarine and listen to the sound of harps whilst the procedure takes place. The Cozy Camp gives children the chance to be scanned in a specialized sleeping bag, under a starry sky in an impressive camp setting.

The Results Speak for Themselves

Children pick up on their parent's reactions when they enter the room, and the setting makes them all feel at ease. "I know for sure, if you've got the child, you've got the parent. If you've got the parent, you can get the child, because they are always looking for that reaction."

Many children suffer from anxiety and are not able to stay still whilst the procedure is underway, making the process stressful and forcing scans to be redone. The new child-friendly scanners make a big difference in how children react to being scanned; scanning time has been reduced and there is more room for more patients to be scanned sooner. This success with patients isn't everything for the team. "I measure success on the influence that I have had on the conversation on the ride home for the family."

As Dietz rightly says, "when you design for meaning, good things will happen."



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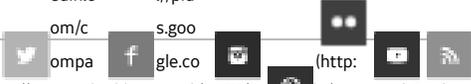
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