



Single-mom adventures with autism: living through my son's surgery

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When my 6-year-old son started randomly screaming in pain, it was not immediately apparent what was wrong. My son, whose autism severely limits his communication, could not tell me what was causing his agony. After a whole day of seeing him hold his jaw and run away in fear when I tried to examine his mouth, I realized that he had a toothache and we went to his dentist.

Dental visits are a routine which usually involve me sitting in the “Minions”-decorated chair while holding my son in a wrestling grip so that the dentist can have a quick look before he wriggles from my grasp. It did not take much time that day to find out that he had advanced tooth decay in many of his baby teeth. The dentist told me straightaway that he needed oral surgery.

My son and I are lucky to have an understanding dental surgeon but for many practitioners, dealing with pediatric patients on the autism spectrum can be difficult. Autistic children can react badly to sensory stimuli, may not be able to

understand or to communicate their concerns, and can have a lot of anxiety about medical procedures. They can be uncooperative and often require sedation or general anaesthesia for even minor dental procedures.

Patients on the autism spectrum are common in the medical field but they aren't well represented in graphic novels or in the medical literature. Graphic medicine - exploring medical issues through comics - is an accessible approach that explores illness from the perspective of the patient, the caregiver, or the healthcare provider. The reader can more clearly visualise the struggle. Triumphs, setbacks, tragedies, treatments, and all the events in between - the human element, in other words - are added to the narrative of the illness.

By sharing this story, I hope to evoke awareness about being a caregiver to an autistic individual. If one parent with an autistic child (and there are millions of us out there) can read this and feel less alone, this story will have done its job.

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IT WAS AMAZING! THROUGH ALL THE PAIN AND SEDATION MY SON'S DEVOTION TO THE UGLY METAL ELEVATOR HAD REMAINED UNDIMMED.



THE NURSE VERY KINDLY LET MY SON RIDE IN THE ELEVATOR BEFORE WHEELING HIM OUT TO THE CAR.



WE SPENT THE REST OF THE DAY EATING ICE CREAM AND WATCHING "DISNEY SR."

