Something Beats Nothing

The four walls of an emergency room (yes, room) provide no empathy. No nature-scape to lower autonomic response, nothing of interest to see. Yes, some rooms have a television that seems to only show Maury Povich and Judge Judy, audio-casted by a muffled, buzzing speaker box, disinfected, maybe, yesterday. Not relaxing. The usual emergency department experience is scientifically designed to increase anxiety, from the first moment of having to publicize your problem in triage, to abject the lack of understanding exemplified by the statement "why am I getting this scan?" Finally comes the nonsense that we call discharge instructions: Return if you get worse! Don't forget to rate us as a 5 out 5 in likelihood to refer! (OK, they don't use that many exclamation marks).

Within this context, Coggins et al, in this month's POTM, Randomised Control Trial of Adult Therapeutic Coloring for the Management of Significant Anxiety in the Emergency Department, offer a conceptually important work in terms of offering distraction therapy over nothing. Like the coloring books for kids at restaurants, giving patients a coloring book may distract them from the pressing four walls, the harsh fluorescent light, the screams of other patients, and the muffled buzzing. The gambit seemed to work. See Figure 3, as it shows the effect on patient-reported anxiety on a survey called the HADS-A. And while I usually stay away from methodological review in the POTM, may I point out that HADS-A primarily assesses anxiety trait (the underlying tendency to be anxious), with few questions about anxiety state (how stressed/anxious are you right now?). More probing into anxiety state may have revealed larger effect. Nonetheless, these data provide novel evidence that offering our patients some distraction beats nothing.

Best wishes,
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