

Kid-friendly environment at visual center allows for better eye exam

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When new patients are brought to the UCSF Visual Center for the Child, eye examinations begin even before they enter the doctor's room.

In the center's waiting area, colorful murals and toys engage children and allow doctors to observe them first in a casual setting, checking for warning signs such as a tilted head or squinting eyes.

“When we examine young children in a nonthreatening way, we get information we might not get otherwise,” said ophthalmologist Tina Rutar, MD, the center’s director.

The center, which opened in 2010, is designed specifically with the aim of providing more comprehensive exams and treatment for children.



Before that, children visiting the Department of Ophthalmology had to use adult-sized equipment in scary exam rooms that didn’t necessarily

cater to their unique needs, even though the department was considered one of the nation's best facilities for pediatric ophthalmology. The challenges inspired the creation of a separate clinic devoted to serving their youngest patients.

“The developmental ages between 0 and 6 are a sensitive period for vision. If the brain doesn't learn how to see then, there can be permanent damage, including blindness,” she said.

Like the waiting rooms, toys and videos also are present in the exam room to put children at ease and distract them from doctors looking at the retina and optic nerve using a cordless, indirect ophthalmoscope. The interactive, kid-friendly setting is key to identifying problems as early as possible, according to Rutar.

“We are lucky to have this unique space,” she said.

Pediatricians generally refer patients to the Visual Center whenever they fail basic vision exams or have conditions such as blocked tear ducts, congenital cataracts, or outward drift of the eyes. If a child is suspected of having a rare disease, the center's doctors have access to advanced imaging tools and all the resources of the adult ophthalmology department.

Provided by University of California, San Francisco

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