

Pediatric ED at Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital at Hackensack Meridian Health Renews IBCCES Autism Certification

HACKENSACK, NJ, UNITED STATES, July 2, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) renews the [Certified Autism Center™](#) (CAC) designation for the [Pediatric Emergency Department at Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital](#) at Hackensack University Medical Center. To maintain the credential, at least 80% of the children's hospital's patient-facing staff completed updated training designed to enhance their ability to support, assist, and care for all children, especially autistic and sensory-sensitive individuals and their families.



"The Emergency Department is, by nature, a fast-paced and high-sensory environment," says Gregory Sugalski, M.D., MBA, Chair, Emergency Medicine, Hackensack University Medical Center, Professor, Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine. "This initiative is a game-changer for our clinical teams, giving them the specialized training and tools to effectively reduce sensory overload, improve communication, and de-escalate anxiety for our autistic patients. By continuing to lead in autism-friendly healthcare, we are not only improving the patient experience but are fundamentally enhancing the quality and safety of the medical care we provide to the neurodiverse community."

"We are incredibly proud to have our Pediatric Emergency Department recertified as a Certified Autism Center™," says Alice Kazekjian, ETC/PEDS ED/OBS, Administrative Director of Nursing, Hackensack University Medical Center. "When we became the first in New Jersey to earn this designation, we set a new standard, and this recertification demonstrates our team's sustained dedication to understanding and meeting the unique needs of our autistic patients and their

families, ensuring a safe and supportive environment when they are at their most vulnerable."

"This recertification is a testament to the clinical excellence and dedication of our entire team," says Virteeka Sinha, M.D., Division Chief, Pediatric Emergency Medicine, Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital at Hackensack University Medical Center. "An emergency visit can be an overwhelming experience for any child, but for a child on the autism spectrum, it presents unique challenges. The specialized training our physicians, nurses, and team have undergone to earn this certification equips them with the crucial tools and communication strategies needed to decrease anxiety and deliver effective, patient-centered care. This is about providing safer, more efficient, and more precise medical care. By investing in specialized programs that support our neurodiverse patients, we're not only improving the hospital experience today, but we are also leaders in setting standards for comprehensive pediatric care for all children."



IBCCES autism and accessibility training transforms healthcare facilities from a place that merely treat patients to one that truly cares for them. By proactively removing barriers to care, facilities are able to streamline operations, reach an underserved market, deepen trust and loyalty, and establish themselves as an indispensable community institution.

Since the original designation of Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital in 2024, Hackensack Meridian Health has continued to strengthen autism services network-wide with inclusive, sensory-friendly care through the following initiatives:

□ **Sensory Carts:** Sensory carts are available across the network in pediatric spaces, including emergency departments, oncology units, and pediatric intensive care units. These carts are equipped with items such as noise-canceling headphones and other support items to help manage sensory challenges, particularly during stressful procedures like blood draws. Team members are trained to use these tools to create a calmer, more child-friendly interaction.



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Virteeka Sinha, M.D., Division Chief, Pediatric Emergency Medicine

□ Patient Passport - a Journey to "Sensory Friendly Care": The Patient Passport is a document to be completed by caregivers that provides specific information about a patient's triggers and sensory issues. This allows providers to deliver individualized, sensory-friendly care, fostering a more positive experience for both the patient and their family.

□ Epic Coping Tool: After five years of development, this new questionnaire tool has just been integrated into the Epic electronic health record system this spring. It will

prompt nurses to ask caregivers about a patient's developmental needs, such as ADHD and autism. If a family chooses to share information about triggers or sensory issues, a blue heart symbol will appear in the electronic record and a blue heart magnet will be placed on the patient's door. This discreet signal will alert all team members to consult with the nursing team to understand the patient's specific needs before entering the room. This tool, which will be available in all inpatient, outpatient, and ambulatory settings, originated from a successful pilot Pediatrics program at Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital.

□ Autism Sprint: This initiative at both children's hospitals is designed to break down barriers to accessing a developmental-behavioral evaluation. By expanding diagnostic capacity, reducing bottlenecks, and prioritizing young patients who demonstrate possible behaviors associated with autism spectrum disorders, the Autism Sprint aims to significantly decrease wait times for families seeking a diagnosis in order to begin treatment as early as possible.

□ "While You Wait": The "While You Wait" workshop provides families with valuable resources and guidance from the moment they request a developmental evaluation. The workshop explains the evaluation process, fosters shared understanding, and helps families determine what services are the right fit. Resources include letters for the school Child Study Team, in addition to early intervention and mental health information to enable access to critical support.

"IBCCES is proud to renew the Certified Autism Center™ designation for the Pediatric Emergency Department at Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital at Hackensack Meridian Children's Health and continue our partnership with their team," says Myron Pincomb, IBCCES CEO & board chairman. "This renewal reflects the hospital's ongoing commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where every child and family feels supported and welcomed."

For 25 years, IBCCES has been a leader in providing autism, sensory, and neurodiversity training and certification for professionals worldwide, including those in healthcare, education, public safety, travel, and corporate sectors. As the only credentialing board offering these programs, IBCCES provides training from subject matter experts and autistic self-advocates, along with long-term support, continuous learning, onsite reviews, and renewal requirements to ensure continued growth and lasting impact.

To further support inclusivity efforts, the Pediatric Emergency Department at Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital at Hackensack Meridian Children's Health is featured on the [IBCCES Accessibility App](#), which is free to download. This app provides individuals with a variety of disabilities real-time guidance on certified destinations, sensory-friendly spaces, and tailored recommendations. By connecting users to accessible locations worldwide, the app helps ensure seamless, enjoyable experiences for everyone.

IBCCES also provides access to resources such as [AccessibilityCertified.com](#) and [AutismTravel.com](#), which are free online tools for families that list certified locations and professionals. Each organization listed on the site has met IBCCES certification requirements.

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About Hackensack Meridian Children's Health

Hackensack Meridian Children's Health provides the most comprehensive and highest level of quality care to young patients in the state of New Jersey. The children's network is comprised of two children's hospitals – Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital at Hackensack University Medical Center in Hackensack and K. Hovnanian Children's Hospital at Jersey Shore University Medical Center in Neptune – and a large network of pediatric subspecialists and pediatricians. Both hospitals ranked #1 in New Jersey in the U.S. News World Report 2023-24 Best Children's Hospital Report. The combined cancer, nephrology, neurology & neurosurgery, and urology programs at both hospitals ranked among the top 50 in the nation in the U.S. News & World Report. Visit www.hackensackmeridianhealth.org/kids for more information about Hackensack Meridian Children's Health.

About IBCCES

Delivering the global standard for training and certification in the fields of autism, neurodiversity, and accessibility – IBCCES provides a series of certification programs that empower professionals to be industry leaders and improve the outcomes for the individuals they serve. For 25 years, IBCCES has been a global leader, setting the industry standard in autism and cognitive differences training. IBCCES works in over 125 countries and provides training in 8 languages, and its programs have been recognized around the world as the leading benchmark in training and certification.

In addition to individual certification programs, IBCCES partners with cities, destinations, and organizations on initiatives like the Certified Autism Destination™ (CAD) and Autism Certified City™ (ACC), ensuring autistic and sensory-sensitive residents and visitors feel welcomed and safe. Destinations that achieve the CAD designation have completed a specialized program that ensures a multitude of recreation, hospitality, and entertainment organizations have completed an autism and sensory-sensitivity training, certification, and IBCCES facilities review process. The ACC designation expands on that program and includes IBCCES training and certification for the

public safety, education, healthcare, and workplace sectors.

IBCCES also created the Accessibility App, AutismTravel.com, and AccessibilityCertified.com – free resources for individuals with a variety of neurodiversities and disabilities, listing certified locations and connecting individuals to other resources and each other.

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