

Autism Spectrum Disorder and Mental Health Conditions



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Disclosures



- I have nothing to disclose.
- I do not intend to discuss off-label uses of medications.

Objectives



- Describe common primary mental health conditions in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Discuss role of multi-disciplinary team and technology to accurately identify causes, participate in interventions and monitor response to treatments
- Describe psychopharmacologic interventions and psychosocial-environmental-nutritional-sensory-behavioral interventions to treat behavioral disturbances and primary mental health disorders in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- ASD – Mild, Moderate, Severe. With and without Intellectual disability
- Replaces Pervasive Developmental Disorders
- Asperger's disorder is ASD without Intellectual Disability (aka High functioning Autism)
- Social Communication Disorder
- Autism traits



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Symptoms typically visible between 12 and 24 months (e.g., delayed language patterns, unusual communication patterns, lack of social interest, atypical social interactions, odd patterns of play).
- Median age of diagnosis is after age 4 years.
- High variability in symptoms from one person to another.
- Many individuals show global improvement in adolescent.

– McDougle C.J. Editor. *Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Oxford University Press, 2016.



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Social impairment is the hallmark symptom – social motivation/drive, social cognition, social communication
- Restricted and repetitive behaviors and interests
- Sensory sensitivities
- Behavioral disturbances (e.g., anxiety related to change, intense and prolonged outbursts/temper tantrums, self-injurious behaviors, aggression-irritability)

– McDougle C.J. Editor. *Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Oxford University Press, 2016.



Neurobiology of ASD

- Deficient oxytocin function.
- Vasopressin dysfunction.
- Social reward system impaired.
- Impaired TOM (Theory of Mind neurocircuits), mirror neuron system, executive function, and weak central coherence.

– McDougle CJ. Editor. Autism Spectrum Disorder. Oxford University Press, 2016.



Systematic Multi-disciplinary Approach

- Medical evaluation
- Functional behavioral analysis (FBA)
- Psychiatric evaluation
- Use of technology (e.g., telemedicine)

– McDougle CJ. Editor. Autism Spectrum Disorder. Oxford University Press, 2016.
– <https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Challenging%20Behaviors%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>



Medical Evaluation

- Allergies (e.g., food)
- Gastrointestinal problems (e.g., constipation, diarrhea, GERD)
- Seizures
- Pain (e.g., headache, migraine)
- Eczema
- Ear and respiratory infections
- TBI-related

– <http://nationalautismassociation.org/pdf/MedicalComorbiditiesinASD2013.pdf>
– Hollingue et al 2018. Autism Research.



Psychiatric Evaluation

- Medical causes
- Medication induced behavioral problems
- ADHD
- Sleep disorders
- ASD related persistent aggression and or self-injurious behaviors
- ASD with persistent anxiety
- Major Depression
- Psychotic disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- OCD
- Personality disorder (e.g., Schizotypal personality disorder)
- Trauma-related disorders

– McDougle CJ. Editor. *Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Oxford University Press, 2016.



Psychiatric Medications

- ADHD medications (stimulants, atomoxetine, clonidine, guanfacine)
- Aripiprazole and risperidone approved by FDA for treatment of ASD related persistent aggression and or self-injurious behaviors
- Antidepressants for Major depression

– McDougle CJ. Editor. *Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Oxford University Press, 2016.



Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

- Under the supervision of Board Certified Behavior Analysts

– Association of Behavior Analysis International
<https://www.abainternational.org/welcome.aspx>



Communication Tips

- Do not rely on facial expression or body language
- Do not expect normal eye contact
- Be aware of potential for self-stimulating behaviors which may help calm the individual
- Self-stimulating behaviors may include hand flapping, finger flicking, eye blinking, rocking, pacing, repetitive noises, or echolalia (repeating what the other person is saying)
- Be aware of special communication devices the individual may use (e.g., augmentative communication program on the person's iPad)

– Source: https://www.autism.com/law_enforcement



Other interventions

- Education and training of family (parents) and professional caregivers/care partners
- Occupational therapy: Sensory integration strategies
- Speech and language pathologists: Communication strategies
- Dietician: Nutritional approaches
- Nidotherapy (modifying environment to match the strengths of the person with ASD)

– McDougle C.J. Editor. Autism Spectrum Disorder. Oxford University Press, 2016



High-tech approaches

- Screen-based media (e.g., tablets and smartphones) to capitalize on visual perception and visual search strengths
- Telemedicine and EMR
- Behavior Imaging
- Technology-based augmentative communication strategies
- Monitoring technology (e.g., GPS, medical alert)
- Access to healthcare provider notes and their input
- Virtual reality based approaches
- Other

– McDougle C.J. Editor. Autism Spectrum Disorder. Oxford University Press, 2016
 – <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/Autism/Pages/default.aspx>




Resources

- **Upcoming Autism Mental Health conference on November 2, 2019 hosted by University of Idaho and partners.**
- **American Academy of Pediatrics**
- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/Autism/Pages/default.aspx>
- **Autism Research Institute**
<https://www.autism.com>
- **Autism Speaks** <https://www.autismspeaks.org>
- **Autism Society of America** <http://www.autism-society.org>
- **American Psychiatric Association**
<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/autism>



Resources

- **Challenging Behaviors Tool-Kit**
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Challenging%20Behaviors%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>



Thank you for your attention

