

Understanding Autism: A Community Approach

What We Learned

Autism greatly affects the patient as well as his or her family. The etiology is not completely understood. Patients exhibit varying degrees of severity. Possible genetic links are being explored.

The condition

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD): Various disorders that impact developmental well-being such as communication, social interaction, & behavioral impairments.

Pathophysiology

- Unknown cause
- Generally thought as an abnormality in brain structure or function
- Autistic brains are slightly larger and heavier.
- Theories include: heredity, genetics & medical problems
- No single trigger.

Clinical Manifestations

- Insistence on sameness; resistance to change
- Repeating words or phrases in place of normal, responsive language
- Preference to being alone
- Tantrums
- Little or no eye contact
- Noticeable physical over-activity or extreme under-activity
- Uneven gross/fine motor skills
- Non-responsive to verbal cues; appears deaf

The condition in populations

- **Prevalence**
 - Average of 1 in 150 in US have ASD
 - Occur in ALL Racial, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Groups
 - 4 to 7 times More in Boys than Girls
 - 560,000 between 0 to 21 years old have an ASD
 - Median Age of Earliest ASD Diagnosis Range from 4.5years to 5.5years.
- **Risk Factors**
 - Identical Twins vs. Nonidentical Twins
 - Parents who have one child with an ASD have a 2 to 8% chance of having another child that will be affected with an ASD.
- **Diagnosis**
 - 1/3 of Parents Notice Problems before their Childs 1st Birthday
 - 80% of Parents saw Problems by 24 months
- **Economic Cost**

Treatments

- **Behavior and Communication**
 - The focus of speech & language therapy is to expand range of the child's communication skills.
- **Dietary Approaches**
 - Based on the idea that food allergies or lack of vitamins/minerals cause symptoms of ASDs.
- **Medication (ex: Risperidone)**
 - Manage high energy levels, inability to focus, depression, or

Community Nursing Interventions

- **Education**
 - Early signs
 - Possible developmental delays
 - Community Warning Signs of ASD
 - Healthy Lifestyle & Environment to Encourage Development of Child to Full Potential
- **Developmental Screening**
- **Research**
 - Nationwide interventions (CDC)
- **Support**
 - Contact Information for ASD

