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Clinical Update on Autism Spectrum Disorders

Autism Spectrum Disorders – The essential features of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are severe and sustained impairment in social interaction and the development of restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities. These features must be present in the early developmental period, but may not manifest until social demands exceed capabilities. These symptoms cause significant impairment in social, academic or occupational function.

DSM - V Criteria

- A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts.
 - 1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity; abnormal social approach, lack of normal back-and-forth conversation; reduced sharing of interests or emotions; failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.
 - 2. Deficits in nonverbal communication behaviors; gaze aversion, limited or no eye contact, flat or non-expressive affect (facial expression), rigid body posturing, lack of understanding of gestures or semantics of language. Deficits vary depending on severity.
 - 3. Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships; difficulty adjusting behaviors to various social contexts. Difficulties with imaginative play, making friends (absence of interest in peers).

- B. Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities, as manifested by at least two of the following:
 - 1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects or speech (lining up toys, flipping objects, echolalia, idiosyncratic phrases)
 - 2. Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior (extreme distress with small changes, difficulties with transitions; a rigid inflexibility)
 - 3. Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus (strong attachment to unusual objects, perseverative)
 - 4. Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment (indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, interest in parts of an object).

- C. Symptoms must be present in early developmental period (but may not become fully manifested until later as demands exceed capabilities).
- D. Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning.
- E. The symptoms are not better explained by intellectual disability or global developmental delay, though the former frequently co-occur with Autism.

Limitations of DSM V Criteria

Clinical Recognition of Possible Autism Spectrum Disorder

- A. Multiple previous diagnoses
- B. Atypical response to standard interventions for the above disorders
- C. Parent and teach complaints involving multiple areas of functioning and intense over-reactions to minor issues
- D. Unusual interpersonal behaviors during sessions

Assessment of ASD

- A. Pragmatic Assessment Issues
- B. Comprehensive History
- C. Intellectual Evaluation
- D. Clinical Observation
- E. Self-report and personality measures are less useful
- F. Parent and Teacher Forms
- G. Referral
- H. Feedback conferences to parents

Treatment

- A. Educational
- B. Behavioral Strategies at home and school
- C. Family interventions
- D. Individual and Group Therapy outside of school
- E. Medication Intervention
- F. Community Resources
- G. Legal Issues