

Autism is Complex and Each Person Unique; Health Professionals Must Work Together

October is Autism Awareness Month

Ottawa, ON (October 15, 2012) — Each and every person living with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is unique. There is no typical person and there is no typical treatment. Today, many health professionals agree that ASD diagnosis and treatment should be tailored and personalized; an interdisciplinary approach that involves several professions including physicians, psychiatrists, occupational therapists as well as speech-language pathologists (S-LPs), audiologists and supportive personnel.

As part of Autism Awareness Month, the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA) is promoting the importance of interprofessional collaboration in the diagnosis and treatment of ASD.

“An S-LP’s role on the diagnostic team involves assessing speech, language, communication development, play skills, and social skills”, says S-LP and CASLPA member, Tracie Lindblad, S-LP(C), M.Sc., M.Ed., BCBA. “One of our jobs is to determine whether a child’s language delay is the result of a more common communication problem like, for instance, second-language acquisition or a language-based learning disability, or whether the delay could be part of something more serious like ASD.”

Similarly, audiologists can determine if a hearing condition may be contributing to someone’s language delay or social behaviour. For example, a child who speaks unclearly or who ignores their mother’s voice may have ASD; however, their behaviour could also be explained by hearing loss or another auditory disorder.

ASD is extremely complex; diagnosis and treatment cannot be packaged into a singular, tidy box. There is no definitive test, which means diagnosis is a process of elimination and ASD can only be confirmed once health teams have ruled out other disorders. Unfortunately, like with other health-care programs, ASD is not getting the funding it needs. Children in Canada can wait up to two years for proper diagnosis.

“The waiting lists are excruciatingly long. Many parents and caregivers turn to the internet for more information,” says Lindblad. “However, there is a lot of pseudoscience, junk science, and quackery circulating in cyberspace. Parents can be easily duped or misled by people trying to make a quick buck and profit from their desperation and hope.”

Lindblad wants parents and caregivers to know that S-LPs, audiologists and supportive personnel are great resources. They have access to the latest evidence-based research and can help guide parents through diagnosis and treatment.

CASLPA is marking Autism Awareness Month by promoting interprofessional collaboration and highlighting how S-LPs and audiologists are a great source of knowledge. We encourage parents and caregivers concerned about a child’s communication development, or anyone experiencing communication difficulties themselves, to seek help. For more information about ASD, please visit the Autism Society

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Canada's website at www.autismsocietycanada.ca. To find an S-LP or audiologist in your area, or to learn more about our professions, please visit www.speechandhearing.ca.

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CASLPA, with over 6,000 members, is the only national body that supports and represents the professional needs of speech-language pathologists, audiologists and supportive personnel inclusively within one organization. Through this support, CASLPA champions the needs of people with communication disorders. Visit CASLPA at www.caslpa.ca or learn more at www.speechandhearing.ca.

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