
State of Hong Kong Children

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Autistic Spectrum Disorder in Children – Any Early Signals

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The core-defining features of autism include – impairment in socialization, impairment in verbal or nonverbal communication, and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior. There has been an increasing incidence of autism worldwide. It is not only due to increased awareness or the broadened concept of a continuum of severity of autistic core or non-core symptoms. There has been an increasing evidence of genetic basis in some subtypes of autism. There is a lack of diagnostic biological markers to date for autism. One should be aware of the implications of a delay in detection of autism in children. If autism is being ignored as being developmental in nature, the long term outcome will be definitely affected. To date, the diagnosis of autism is still a clinical observational checklist approach. Children are barred from possible benefit with early interventional program if the importance of this life long neuro-developmental-psychiatric disorder is not attended to early on in life. Educating child care workers, be it clinical or educational, in the early awareness of warning signals should be implemented. A comprehensive and validated screening instrument or algorithm for early diagnosis of autism is currently unavailable. However, children should be under close surveillance during the early years of life as there is evidence that autism can be reliably diagnosed as early as 12 to 18 months. These warning markers will be highlighted.