

Interdisciplinary Evaluations of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in a Telehealth Arena

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Abstract : Over the last several years, there has been an increase in children identified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Specialists across several disciplines: mental health and medical professionals have been tasked with ensuring accurate and timely evaluations for children with suspected ASD. Due to the nature of the ASD symptom presentation, an interdisciplinary assessment and treatment approach best addresses the needs of the whole child. During the unprecedented COVID-19 Pandemic, clinicians were faced with how to continue with interdisciplinary assessments in a telehealth arena. Instruments that were previously used to assess ASD in-person were no longer appropriate measures to use due to the safety restrictions. For example, The Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule requires examiners and children to be in very close proximity of each other and if masks or face shields are worn, they render the evaluation invalid. Similar issues arose with the various cognitive measures that are used to assess children such as the Weschler Tests of Intelligence and the Differential Ability Scale. Thus the need arose to identify measures that are able to be safely and accurately administered using safety guidelines. The incidence of ASD continues to rise over time. Currently, the Center for Disease Control estimates that 1 in 59 children meet the criteria for a diagnosis of ASD. The reasons for this increase are likely multifold, including changes in diagnostic criteria, public awareness of the condition, and other environmental and genetic factors. The rise in the incidence of ASD has led to a greater need for diagnostic and treatment services across the United States. The uncertainty of the diagnostic process can lead to an increased level of stress for families of children with suspected ASD. Along with this increase, there is a need for diagnostic clarity to avoid both under and over-identification of this condition. Interdisciplinary assessment is ideal for children with suspected ASD, as it allows for an assessment of the whole child over the course of time and across multiple settings. Clinicians such as Psychologists and Developmental Pediatricians play important roles in the initial evaluation of autism spectrum disorder. An ASD assessment may consist of several types of measures such as standardized checklists, structured interviews, and direct assessments such as the ADOS-2 are just a few examples. With the advent of telehealth clinicians were asked to continue to provide meaningful interdisciplinary assessments via an electronic platform and, in a sense, going to the family home and evaluating the clinical symptom presentation remotely and confidently making an accurate diagnosis. This poster presentation will review the benefits, limitations, and interpretation of these various instruments. The role of other medical professionals will also be addressed, including medical providers, speech pathology, and occupational therapy.

Keywords : Autism Spectrum Disorder Assessments, Interdisciplinary Evaluations , Tele-Assessment with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder

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