

Detection of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Children Aged 4-6 Years by Municipal Maternal and Child Health Physicians: An Educational Intervention Study

Authors : M. Van 'T Hof, R. V. Pasma, J. T. Bailly, H. W. Hoek, W. A. Ester

Abstract : Background: The transition into primary school can be challenging for children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Due to the new demands that are made to children in this period, their limitations in social functioning and school achievements may manifest and appear faster. Detection of possible ASD signals mainly takes place by parents, teachers and during obligatory municipal maternal and child health centre visits. Physicians of municipal maternal and child health centres have limited education and instruments to detect ASD. Further education on detecting ASD is needed to optimally equip these doctors for this task. Most research aims to increase the early detection of ASD in children aged 0-3 years and shows positive results. However, there is a lack of research on educational interventions to detect ASD in children aged 4-6 years by municipal maternal and child health physicians. Aim: The aim of this study is to explore the effect of the online educational intervention: Detection of ASD in children aged 4-6 years for municipal maternal and child health physicians. This educational intervention is developed within The Reach-Aut Academic Centre for Autism; Transitions in education, and will be available throughout The Netherlands. Methods: Ninety-two participants will follow the educational intervention: Detection of ASD in children aged 4-6 years for municipal maternal and child health centre physicians. The educational intervention consists of three, one and a half hour sessions, which are offered through an online interactive classroom. The focus and content of the course has been developed in collaboration with three groups of stakeholders; autism scientists, clinical practitioners (municipal maternal and child health doctors and ASD experts) and parents of children with ASD. The primary outcome measure is knowledge about ASD: signals, early detection, communication with parents and referrals. The secondary outcome measures are the number of ASD related referrals, the attitude towards the mentally ill (CAMI), perceived competency about ASD knowledge and detection skills, and satisfaction about the educational intervention. Results and Conclusion: The study started in January 2016 and data collection will end mid 2017.

Keywords : ASD, child, detection, educational intervention, physicians

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