Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a life-long neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts 1 in 68 children. An intensive literature review found a lack of awareness of the disorder and appropriate care measures by nurses in the emergency department (ED).

- A life-long neurodevelopmental and neurobehavioral disorder
- Impacts 1 out of every 68 eight-to-year-old children in the U.S. 1-42 are boys and 1-189 are girls
- Occurs in all races, ethnic and socioeconomic groups
- Includes: Classical Autism, Asperger’s and Pervasive Developmental Disorder
- Patient population that will be permanently present in our practices
- EDs have seen an increase with inpatient admissions
- ED’s nurses begin the patient perception of care
- Improvement in understanding of disorder and methods for providing care to patient population is needed

The CDC surveillance summary found that:
- 31% of these children had IQ scores in the disabled range (<70)
- 23% were in the borderline range of 71-85
- 46% were of average or above average

Common psychological and medical comorbidities
- Seizures and Epilepsy
- Sleep and Gastrointestinal Disorders
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Anxiety and Depression
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Learning Disabilities

To enhance ED nursing staff awareness of care of ASD patients and appropriate nursing interventions, an evidence-based quality improvement project was developed and implemented

Two main domains concerning diagnosis criteria of ASD
- Deficits in social communication and social interaction
- Restricted or repetitive behaviors or interests

Frequently seen symptoms with this diagnosis are the following
- Impairments in social interaction
- Fixation on objects & concrete thinking
- Low frustration tolerance
- Repetitive actions and/or words
- Over-stimulation
- Hyposensitivity and Hypersensitivity

The hypersensitivity and hyposensitivity symptoms of this disorder are significant challenges
- Responses to stimuli jumbled
- Over-sensitive to sound, touch, sight, smells and taste
- May not recognize a typically painful injury
- Some research suggests those with ASD and ADD/ADHD have higher rates of injuries requiring medical attention
- Study found that ASD patients had a significant increase in ED visits due to psychiatric reasons versus a non ASD pediatric patient

Currently there is limited training or awareness concerning this patient population
- There is a lack of strong evidence concerning best practices
- It is critical to begin educating ED staff concerning ASD
- Further research is needed

Research for educational presentation from various professional journals including pediatric nursing, behavioral pediatrics, nursing and medical journals

Successful implementation of quality improvement project engaged key stakeholders
- South Carolina Autism Society
- Individuals with ASD and their families
- The ED nurse manager, nurse educator and the staff nurses

An educational presentation presented to staff members of the emergency department

Presented at mandatory staff meetings

The content included: definition of the disorder, incidence statistics, signs and symptoms of disorder, and evidence-based practices for their care

Pictures of staff members’ families with ASD was used for impact

Nursing staff instructed on the importance of querying patients/family members concerning Autism Spectrum Disorder during ED visit

Education on appropriate nursing interventions: computer apps, visual cue cards, tongue depressors, x-ray apron

Strategies utilized to address various learning styles and needs of the adult learner
- Material presented in visual, auditory and kinetic format
- Power Point presentations used
- Discussions and follow up feedback

Subjective post-implementation feedback indicated a change in practice due to increased awareness of ASD in the ED

- The ED nurses reported improved awareness of the disorder and techniques for providing patient care
- Staff nurses discussed items available in their ED that could be utilized for ASD patient care
- Staff nurses determined methods for decreasing stimuli in ED
- The program outcomes, to implement evidence-based quality improvement practices and improve efficacy of assessment and treatment of patients with ASD were achieved
- The quality improvement project was budget neutral

REFERENCES


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