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AUTISM AWARENESS: DIAGNOSING AUTISM/ASD--AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

April 7, 2011 by cpehrson

As parents, we all want our new baby to be perfect...ten fingers, ten toes. We want to be assured that he is breathing well, his color is good, his Apgar score is high and that all is well. We hope for a perfect baby, and most of the time, that’s what we get...but not always.

Newborns grow and develop at a tremendous rate. It is the time when many developmental milestones are achieved. It is also the time when developmental delays may first appear. Research now suggests that children as young as one year old can show signs of autism. For these reasons, frequent wellness exams are performed during infancy to make sure that development is progressing normally.

Pediatricians and family doctors continue to assess child development at each regular well-child checkup for the first few years. Further testing may be needed if there is concern on the part of the doctor or parents.

This is particularly true whenever a child fails to meet language milestones such as: babbling by 12 months, gesturing (pointing, waving bye-bye) by 12 months, speaking single words by 16 months, saying two-word phrases by 24 months (non-echoing), or loss of any language or social skills at any age. These delays may signal a significant developmental delay or even autism.

Because autism encompasses a broad spectrum of symptoms, a single brief evaluation cannot predict the child’s true abilities or diagnosis. Further testing might include:

- Hearing
- Communication, language, speech
- Motor skills
- Screening test for autism
- Thinking abilities
- Social/behavioral skills

Some parents may be reluctant to have a child diagnosed because of concerns about labeling the child, or the fear that a diagnosis might actually be confirmed and their lives will be turned upside down.

But, failure to get a diagnosis can lead to failure to get the early treatment and services that the child needs. Thus, it is critical that, once autism/ASD (autism spectrum disorder) is suspected, parents pursue getting an evaluation as soon as possible.

Parents often don’t know who to turn to first to schedule an appointment. Getting a thorough and accurate evaluation becomes a problem when parents have to bring in so many different professionals to evaluate specific developmental areas.

Service providers at the CPD have listened to the stories that parents have shared with them about the difficulty of taking their child to several different clinics to have further testing done. They have taken this dilemma to heart and designed an interdisciplinary clinic, the ASD Clinic, to bring together, under one roof, a team of professionals that parents can come to for the necessary evaluations.
This team consists of a medical doctor, a psychologist, a speech/language pathologist, occupational therapist, and a care coordinator. After an interview and an initial screening is conducted in the home by one of the members, the team meets to review and discuss the next steps for the child. If it appears the child needs further testing, the ASD Clinic becomes the family's medical home and evaluations are scheduled.

The ASD team is excited about this interdisciplinary model. Their goal is to minimize the number of days between the time the first suspicion of autism is mentioned and when an accurate diagnosis is made. They also hope to provide a compassionate and informative environment where parents who do have a child diagnosed with ASD will find the support, resources, and early intervention services needed to give their child the best possible outcome.

If you suspect that your child may have some developmental delays that might indicate autism/ASD, an excellent web site to go to become better informed is Autism Speaks. Here you can review the “Red Flags” for autism and decide if your child needs further evaluation.

The ASD Clinic in Logan, Utah is ready to provide an interdisciplinary assessment and lead you to the services and resources that you need.

*Note: This is the 2nd in a series during April’s Autism Awareness Month of how the CPD is supporting and providing services and resources for children with autism.*