Autism Spectrum Disorders in Young Children

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KEYWORDS

- Autism Young children Early diagnosis
- Early intervention Family

The focus of this review is on the early identification, assessment, and treatment of young children (0–5 years of age) with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). ASDs are diagnosed in approximately 1 out of 150 children in the United States, ^{1,2} and given the increasing evidence that early intervention improves outcomes for children with ASD, there is an urgent need to enhance early detection and intervention efforts.³ Retrospective parent reports, ^{4,5} early home videotapes, ^{6,7} and newer prospective studies of younger siblings of children with ASD who are at elevated risk ^{8,9} provide converging evidence that the age at onset for the majority of cases of ASD is the second year of life. We first review the early signs and symptoms of ASD, then describe some of the measures that can be employed for screening and diagnosis, discuss the family context with respect to both adaptation to diagnosis and treatment, and conclude with a brief review of interventions for young children with ASD.

Traditionally, the term pervasive developmental disorders (PDDs) has been employed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, text revision (DSM-IV-TR), referring to autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, PDD not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), childhood disintegrative disorder, and Rett Disorder. In this article, we use the term ASDs to refer to the diagnostic category of PDDs. Specifically, we focus on the diagnosis of autistic disorder (AD) and PDD-NOS, as the majority of research on young children has focused on these conditions. Our preference for the term ASD reflects recognition that along with restrictive interests and repetitive behaviors, the primary developmental perturbations that characterize ASDs are social and communicative in nature. Moreover, the term ASD reflects an understanding that symptoms and behaviors in these three domains are best quantified as continuous phenomena. In

This work was supported by a grant to A. Carter from Autism Speaks.

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