

Children diagnosed with "ASD" are first of all ... children

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Editor In Chief
European Journal of Paediatric Dentistry

DOI: 10.23804/ejpd.2020.21.01.01

editorial

It is estimated that worldwide one in 160 children is affected with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Based on aepidemiological studies conducted over the past 50 years, the prevalence of ASD appears to be increasing globally.

We talk about "spectrum" due to the variety of symptoms and the complexity in providing a coherent and uniform clinical definition; autistic disorders include a whole series of conditions and syndromes with behavioural characteristics as a common denominator, although at varying degrees or levels of intensity [Pearson et al., 2018; Ferrazzano et al., 2019].

Patients diagnosed with ASD do not differ from other patients as far as their dental treatments or oral health issues are concerned. However, due to some of their characteristic behaviours or disorders, such as limitation in communication, self-injurious behaviour, eating habits (uncontrolled and restrictive feeding), opposition to dental care, hyposensitivity to dental pain and hypersensitivity to external stimuli, they are at a greater risk of having worse oral health conditions than the general population [Jaber, 2011].

The paediatric dentist should mainly focus on the behavioural approach, working in collaboration with the patient's family in order to recognise the desires, abilities and limits of the child. We have to become the reference for families and caregivers, instructing them on how to provide optimal home dental care. On this subject, Simon Baron-Cohen, director of the Autism Research Center at the University of Cambridge, defined autism as "an example of neurodiversity", stating that "differently wired brains lead to different profiles of strengths and challenges, and should not be judged as better or worse. They're just different. People with autism are asking for acceptance and respect".

It should be noted that children, including those diagnosed with ADS, are not healthy without good oral health.

References

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