

What do you know about Autism?

by John Appleton

With Cancer and Heart Disease making headline news almost daily Autism is a disorder that many of us haven't heard much about but it is nevertheless a disorder that we should be very aware of because the statistics are indeed frightening.

So what is Autism? Autism is a developmental disability that typically involves delays and impairment in social skills, language, and behaviour. Autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning that it affects people differently thus autism is often referred to as ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). Some children may have speech, whereas others may have little or no speech. Less severe cases may be diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) or with Asperger's Syndrome (these children typically have normal speech, but they have many "autistic" social and behavioural problems).

Left untreated, many autistic children will not develop effective social skills and may not learn to talk or behave appropriately. Very few individuals recover completely from autism without any intervention.

There are two types of Autism. Some parents report that their child seemed different at birth. These children are referred to as having *early-onset autism*. Other parents report that their child seemed to develop normally and then had a major regression resulting in autism, usually around 12-24 months. These children are referred as having late-onset or *regressive autism*. Many parents report that their children were completely normal (e.g., speech, behavior, social) until sometime between 1 and 2 years of age

Autism affects four times as many boys as it does girls.

There are no reliable statistics in New Zealand however in 1985 overseas estimates suggested that autism affected 4 children in every 10,000. But a 2001 U.K. study showed that the incidence had risen to 65 children in every 10,000 - i.e. 1 in 150

This is a 15 fold increase in 15 years. What has gone wrong? This huge increase can not be explained by genes alone. Genes require 12,000 years to change so there can be no such thing as a "genetic epidemic". The significant change has been in regressive autism. In 1980 - 34% of total diagnoses were regressive autism but in 1997 - 75% of total diagnoses were regressive autism. This has happened in just one generation.

The national society - Autism New Zealand puts the cost of autism at nearly 5 million dollars over a lifetime for a severely affected autistic child with learning difficulties, nearly 2 million dollars for people with "high functioning" autism. Clearly we need to be taking very decisive action to prevent what is clearly a burgeoning epidemic. We spent \$200 million dollars on a Meningitis vaccination programme but I am not aware of central government showing anything like the interest in funding research into the causes and thus prevention and treatment options for ASD.

My own interest in Autism was sharply focused after being invited to attend a two day seminar on ASD and ADHD organized by the Australasian College of Nutritional and Environmental Medicine (ACNEM).

This seminar was attended by GPs, Naturopaths and Pharmacists from the Northland to Dunedin. Keynote speakers included Bill Walsh PhD head of the famous Pfeiffer Clinic in the U.S. and Dr Anthony Underwood renowned Australian Pediatrician.

The take home message from this seminar was that **autism is treatable**. This despite the fact that parents are often given a message of no hope on diagnosis. They are frequently told that their child will not have any imagination or social skills and is likely to be institutionalised. Parents typically go through a period of grieving and then many of them start searching for answers.

My own search for answers has turned up some disturbing facts, but until such time as we find a 'smoking gun' or there is conclusive evidence about the causes of autism, parents with autistic children need to know that there is somewhere they can turn. In fact we all need to know what can be done to help parents and their children.

At the Auckland seminar we were instructed in a Biomedical treatment protocol for ASD and ADHD and case studies presented from the Pfeiffer Clinic in the U.S., from Australia and from New Zealand clearly illustrated the effectiveness of this approach. Biomedical treatment focuses on individualised investigation and targeted biochemical / metabolic interventions addressing underlying metabolic dysfunction thereby improving the health and brain function of affected children.

Biomedical treatment has helped thousands of children around the world to improve in speech, language, socialization, behaviour, immunity, digestion and more.

There are four key components of "Biomedical Intervention" and it is important to address all of these:

1. Dietary Intervention that includes restorative foods and eliminates harmful foods.
2. Gastro Intestinal healing to improve digestive function to best absorb nutrients and effectively screen out toxins.
3. Nutritional Medicine to support organ systems for improved metabolic, immunologic, neurologic and digestive function. Supplements are prescribed based on individual needs and include vitamins, minerals, amino acids and essential fatty acids.
4. Detoxification of heavy metals (mercury, lead, arsenic...) and POPs (persistent organic pollutants like PCBs)

This is of course an oversimplification of the protocol but we are very fortunate in New Zealand to have some wonderful Doctors who have made an in depth study of ASD and ADHD. Having distilled masses of information from around the world our Doctors have developed a protocol that New Zealand mothers are using with very impressive results.

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