

What GPs and Primary Care Practitioners need to know

- Your patient with Autism Spectrum Disorder (including Asperger syndrome)
- Reasonable adjustments that can help
- Useful Resources

Your patient with ASD will have core difficulties in:

- Social communication
- Social Interaction
- Social Imagination/Flexibility of thought

These will present differently in each individual and in some they may be very subtle. Some individuals prefer to view autism not so much as a disorder but as a different way of thinking and viewing the world. Sensitivity to differences in how people wish for autism to be described is advised.

Your patient may at first seem to have good communication skills or may appear to have no means of communication. It is important not to judge by what you first see.

Many individuals with ASD have

- Sensory processing issues
- Special interests or repetitive routines/behaviours
- ASD is also associated with increased rates of
- Epilepsy
- Stress and Anxiety
- Affective disorders
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Developmental Co-ordination Disorder

Reasonable adjustments that can help

It will not be possible to know your patient's needs in detail before the first appointment. However, there are some simple strategies that will help most individuals with ASD:

Seek information about the individual in advance. This could be via telephone call and seeking consent (if appropriate) to speak to a parent, family member, carer or other person who can support the individual when attending the appointment.

Be advised by the parent or carer

The communicative abilities of every person with ASD are affected in some way, even those who are articulate. Recommend that your patient is accompanied by someone who knows them well and who can advise you on the best approach. If they can help with monitoring treatments between appointments, this is valuable.

Adapt the environment for sensory differences

Your patient will be calmer and have better concentration if the environment is quiet, uncrowded and uncluttered. Strip lighting is best switched off, if possible.

Give your patient extra time to absorb information

It is very likely that your patient will be more anxious than usual. Speaking in a quiet, slow voice, with frequent gaps will give them time to process and absorb the information. Avoid non-factual questions that require interpretation.

Prepare your patient with visual aids

Many individuals with ASD respond to visual rather than auditory information. Using equipment, diagrams or photographs as visual aids can aid comprehension for some.

Provide a written summary

Your patient can read this at home when s/he is calmer. This is useful for parents/carers too, who may be too distracted by their support role to take on board all your advice.

Consider ongoing support needs and referral

You may well be the first port of call so do not assume that your patient and family are already in touch with statutory/voluntary support networks.

Consider a home visit

This may be a necessary option for some patients, especially if you have a large and busy surgery, where it might be hard to make the necessary adaptations.

Useful Resources

Autism Network Scotland connects and communicates with individuals on the autistic spectrum, their families, carers, and practitioners working in the field of autism. It is a hub of reliable and impartial information, signposting people to supports, resources and useful information. ANS offers a platform for knowledge exchange and sharing of good practice and promotes a solution focused approach. ANS supports regional networks across Scotland by providing a neutral space for discussion and communication.

www.autismnetworkscotland.org.uk

Healthtalk.org aims to provide free, reliable information about health issues, by sharing people's real-life experiences. You can watch people sharing their stories about autism

<http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/autism>

The National Autistic Society is a leading UK charity providing support, help and information for those with ASD, their families, carers and links to resources including information for GPs.

<http://www.autism.org.uk/working-with/health/info-for-gps.aspx>

Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (2007) SIGN 98: Assessment, Diagnosis and Clinical Interventions for children and young people with autism spectrum disorders.

The Scottish Strategy for Autism: Menu of Interventions (2013) was developed by a multi-agency group (including

parents and carers). It provides a guide to intervention aimed at providing support to individuals on the autism spectrum across the age range and across the whole of the spectrum.

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0043/00438221.pdf>

The University of Birmingham and NHS Scotland have developed a specialist, online learning resource on ASD, designed for GPs and Primary Care Practitioners, where you will find more detailed information on:

- The Patient with an ASD
- Practical Strategies
- Health Issues
- Diagnostic Issues

<http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/home/learning-and-cpd/learning-spaces/autism-spectrum-disorder.aspx>