Psychiatric Medication Use in Autism Spectrum Disorder

Dr. Amanda Sawyer, MD FRCPC
Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist
Centre For Addiction and Mental Health
Holland Bloorview
Lecturer, University of Toronto



Autism ONTARIO
see the potential voir le potentiel

Outline

- Understand prevalence of psychiatric medication use in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Develop an approach for deciding when psychiatric medications may be appropriate in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Develop an approach for evaluating positive and negative effects of psychotropic medications in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Prevalence of Psychiatric Medication Use

More than 75% of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder will have trialed a psychiatric medication by adulthood

Psychotropic Medication use in Adolescents and Young Adults with ASD in Ontario

Psychotropic & non-psychotropic drug classes	Total Sample (*n*=100)	Adolescents (12-18) (*n*=55)	Adults (19-30) (*n*=45)
	%	%	%
Antipsychotic	56.0	54.5	57.8
Anxiolytics	7.0	7.3	6.7
Antidepressant	54.0	41.8	68.9
Mood Stabilizers	2.0	0	4.4
Stimulants	29.0	40.0	15.6
2 concurrent psychotropic medications	28.0	27.3	28.9
3 concurrent psychotropic medications	16.0	16.4	15.6
4 concurrent psychotropic medications	2.0	0	4.4
Non-psychotropic medication	32.0	25.5	40.0

Lake, Vogan, Sawyer, Weiss & Lunsky, 2014

Medication use in individuals with ASD



- Medications are not superheroes

Formulating mental health and behaviours that challenge

Remember your ABCs



- *All Behaviour is Communication*

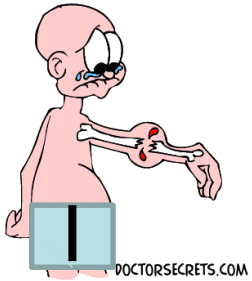
Medical problems are common in ASD



PAIN



ITCHY SKIN



BROKEN BONES



INFECTIONS



DIABETES



HEADACHES



CONSTIPATION



SLEEP PROBLEMS



DENTAL PAIN

Environmental Stressors



Assistance and accommodation

School work	**Chores**	**Independence**
Hygiene		**Team work**
Reading	**Life skills**	**Job**

- Individuals may need more assistance, and/or accommodations to help them reach their goals.
- Certain life skills may always require assistance.

Setting Expectations



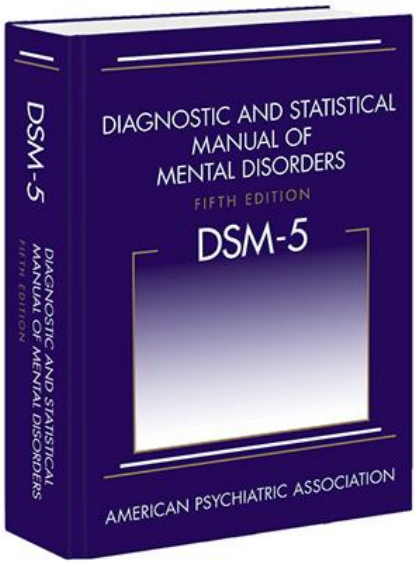
- Too low of expectations can also cause harm

Lived Experience



Psychiatric Diagnosis

ADHD



Depression

Psychosis

Anxiety

Monitoring Medication Use

- Discuss with healthcare provider what symptoms are the target for the medication
    - Are these symptoms going to change with the medication chosen?
    - Is the frequency of the symptoms enough for regular medications to target?

Target Symptoms Baseline

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sunday
Hitting (times/day)	0	5	1	1	5	2	0
Mood (1-5)	5	2	2	2	1	3	5
Repeating phrases (times/day)	5	10	20	30	30	30	30
Leaving the house (hours/day	8	8	8	8	8	2	0

Target Symptoms on Medication

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sunday
Hitting (times/day)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mood (1-5)	5	2	2	2	1	3	5
Repeating phrases (times/day)	5	10	20	60	60	100	100
Leaving the house (hours/day	8	8	8	8	8	2	0

Evaluation

- Why am I on this medication?
- What positive effects is it having?
- What negative effects is it having?
- What would happen if I change the dose?
- Before adding another medication is the medication I am on working?

Discuss medications with healthcare provider

