

20 October 2017

Dr Kiah Evans
Project coordinator
Autism Spectrum Disorder Guidelines Submission
Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism
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Dear Dr Evans,

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is pleased to provide feedback as part of the community consultation on the national guidelines for autism diagnosis.

The RACGP commends Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) on the development of these comprehensive guidelines. We acknowledge the importance of establishing clear criteria for the diagnosis and management of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and believe the draft guidelines capture the primary domains of care provision to individuals with ASD in the general practice setting.

However, we believe the document could be improved to further recognise the important role of GPs in facilitating early diagnosis and we provide the following comments:

Section 6 – ASD Assessment Roles

The RACGP welcomes the recognition of the role of GPs in ASD assessment, more specifically in care coordination (item 6.3) and in the provision of information to support the Diagnostic and Functional and Support Needs Assessment (item 6.6).

GPs' role in early identification and care coordination

Given that GPs are clinical leaders in primary care, the RACGP is of the view that the Autism Spectrum Disorder Guidelines can better delineate the important role of GP in early diagnosis and management of individuals living with ASD.

GPs are in a unique position as healthcare providers for both the individual living with ASD and their family/carers. GPs work across the entire age range, are accessible and closer to home compared to specialist services. As health professionals with regular contact with children and their families, GPs are well placed to notice abnormalities or delays in a child's development that could indicate ASD.

Considering that early diagnosis and intervention can have a significant effect on the long-term health and psycho-social outcomes for those living with ASD, section 6 of the guidelines should emphasise the key role GPs play in facilitating early diagnosis.

Reference should also be made to how other professionals in the multidisciplinary care team, including allied health and medical specialists, can work closely with GPs to maximise healthcare outcomes.

Item 6.4 – Diagnostician

GPs as diagnosticians

The guidelines identify the following professionals in the role of diagnostician: paediatricians, psychiatrists, neurologists, registered psychologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists.

As GPs are not included in this list, it suggests GPs don't have a role in management and that GPs have a peripheral role in the multidisciplinary team.

While most GPs are likely to operate at the level of professional informant and coordinator, some have the skills, knowledge and desire to be involved as diagnostician.

GPs plan an important role in coordinating care through an interdisciplinary team and treating children's associated conditions, including sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal problems, anxiety, and hyperactivity. Diagnostics is a process and general practice is the only medical professionals seeing patients over time. No other specially can offer that.

For a disorder that has such a broad range of possible functional impacts, the RACGP believe it is important to recognise the role of GPs as diagnosticians.

Furthermore, the RACGP believes consideration should be given to education targeting GPs and GP registrars in the identification of early signs of ASD.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Bastian Seidel
President