Medical Challenges associated with aging in Autism

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Diagnostic Challenges

• Medical conditions may present differently in adults with ASD.
  – Symptoms may not be easily recognized by the average physician such as posturing and GI distress
• Atypical or disruptive behavior may be signs of pain and discomfort
  – Sleep problems
  – Excessive tantruming, elf-injury, aggression,
Diagnostic Challenges

• We need valid and reliable diagnostic tools for ASD adults and seniors
• Many are non-verbal and cannot indicate their symptoms
  – Many cannot accurately point to the areas of discomfort. Poor sensory awareness
• Many have self-restricted diets (picky eaters)
  – high carbohydrates diet

Medical Conditions

• Cancer
• Seizures
• Metabolic disorders
• Cardiovascular disorders
• Diabetes
• Arthritis
• Hypertension
• Gastrointestinal disorders
• Obesity
• Tardive dyskinesia
Medically Related Conditions

- Chronic pain
- Dental issues
- Sleep disorders
- Balance and motor challenges
- Sensory processing issues
  - Vision
  - Hearing
  - Vestibular
  - Tactile, taste, smell

Mental Health Conditions

- Frequent mental distress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Post-traumatic stress
- Alzheimer’s Disease
- Psychosis
Preventative Screening

- Adults with DDs and diabetes: screened less frequently than task force guidelines recommend (Shireman et al, 2010)
- Women: low rates breast and cervical cancer screening, esp. in those living at home (Parish et al, 2012)
- Women: most common c/o with menses was PMS and mood, but in ASD women behaviors accompanied menses
- Dysmenorrhea common, treatments underutilized (Hamilton et al, 2011)

Provider Limitations

- PCP shortage
  - Not familiar with autism, not part of medical education
- Limited amount of time to assess these individuals
  - Stressed: time constraints, productivity
  - Paperwork
- Low Medicaid/Medicare reimbursement
What Are some of the Medical Problems for Aging Autistic Adults?

• Finding a PCP
• The Emergency Room and the Hospital
• Insurance
• Medical concerns for adults
  Medications   Obesity
  GI           Seizures
  Sleep        Vision
  Dental care  Preventative care

Parting Words – or What Needs to Be Done

• Many medical problems in childhood continue throughout the lifespan
  – Communication deficits and sensory differences create challenges in medical care
• Much work to do to assure quality medical care for aging adults with autism
  – Physician exposure and training
Parting Words

• Family and professional advocacy for policy change is sorely needed!

• Greater awareness of the needs of aged adults on the autism spectrum.