

AUTISM AND MENTAL HEALTH

DAVID CRISP

Autism. Education, Health & Social Care

INTRODUCTION

It is somewhat of an irony that, while autism is classified as a psychiatric disorder under DSM-5, there is much ignorance about the psychiatric aspects or diagnosis of co-morbid psychiatric disorders of autistic individuals. In truth, autism is a neuro developmental, rather than a psychiatric disorder. Sometimes the presenting symptoms of autism are not the core deficits of social interaction and social communication, but superimposed psychiatric problems such as anger outbursts, depression and hyperactivity. Unfortunately, these problems are either ignored by professionals as being part of autism itself or, conversely, and perhaps more concerning, autistic behaviours are too often misinterpreted as psychiatric disorders. In the latter interpretation, this can lead to many people with autism being institutionalised incorrectly for perceived mental ill health, rather than being considered as autistic behaviours.

There have been some alarming cases in recent years in the UK where staff in general hospital settings have failed to acknowledge the sensory and social communicative problems associated with being in a hospital environment, leading to behavioural problems in autistic individuals being misinterpreted as psychiatric problems and subsequently leading to detention in a mental health unit. Once in such units, the incidents of challenging behaviours often increase dramatically, leading to a longer incarceration than would have been necessary if the needs of an autistic individual had been more fully understood.

There is currently no medication that is universally effective in autism. Yet medications are often prescribed inappropriately for both control of maladaptive behaviours and the treatment of other medical conditions such as seizures. All too often, however, autistic children and adults are over-medicated in an effort to "control" rather than manage behaviours.

This presentation aims to open debate about how best to care and treat individuals with autism when they require medical services. It is from both a personal and professional point of view, as I have autism myself and have children on the autism spectrum, but is also supported by anecdotal evidence from the UK and beyond. The presentation offers to give clinicians and others in the

audience an opportunity to consider autistic individuals from a different perspective than neurotypical individuals before considering how to proceed with psychiatric treatment.

AIM:

Challenges and opportunities for better mental health of autistic individuals in healthcare settings.

CONCLUSION:

Undoubtedly autistic adults and children can have co-morbid psychiatric disorders. Sometimes these are dismissed as being part of their autism presentation. However, sometimes autistic behaviour is misdiagnosed as psychosis or neurosis, when the individual is simply reacting to being in a stressful situation. Improvement,

KEYWORDS: Autism, mental health, general medicine, psychiatry, clinical psychology, advocacy

BIOGRAPHY:

David Crisp is a CPD accredited autism speaker and trainer, with 13 years experience in health and social care, predominantly in the field of autism. Formerly he was a student nurse and civil servant. In 2007, David was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, a form of autism, at the age of 42 years. Subsequently, his children were both diagnosed as autistic, amongst other disabilities. In 2015, David became a certified autism needs assessor with The National Autistic Society, and the following year, he became a qualified trainer and speaker, sharing his personal and professional experiences of autism. In 2020, as a result of COVID, and increasing home caring responsibilities, David became a self-employed speaker and trainer; trading as Wired4autis. David has a lifetime's experience of caring for various members of family, starting from a very young age, providing him with a unique experience as

a son, parent, carer, support worker, trainer, speaker and advocate. David lives in the UK with his wife, 2 grown up children, 3 dogs and a cat