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Consultation on draft Supplement to the Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline

Overall, this document is an extensive, comprehensive review of key GI issues in children with ASD. The remit of the review is relatively narrow, focusing on two specific questions: (1) the frequency of GI symptoms in children with ASD and (2) to presentation patterns of these symptoms. The approach to the data assessment and analysis is appropriate and consistent. The conclusions and discussion of the data regarding these questions is reasoned and balanced. In particular, the difficulties in interpretation of behaviours in children with ASD and their relationship with symptomatology is clearly discussed. Further, the gaps in current knowledge and the various inconsistencies are well delineated.

One point raised in the review of the available data was the variance in control groups. Establishment of a valid and consistent control group is important in being able to derive a valid conclusion. For instance, although rates of GI symptoms in children with ASD may differ to rates in children with typical developmental progress, are they similar to rates in other groups of children with altered eating habits and or communication issues? This and other key variances between available data sets limits the extent of conclusions able to be made at present. In addition, the lack of availability of comprehensive objective assessments in ascertaining rates of GI disorders is also highlighted.

The review is limited to the focus of the two specific questions. Although commenting on broader aspects, it does not consider these in any length. Given past and ongoing controversy regarding the advent and use of various (and expensive) therapies for the management of GI symptoms and/or problems in children with ASD, this also is an important issue, that poses concerns for parents/care-givers and practitioners alike.

Overall, the revised and new recommendations arising from this document overall are clear, appropriate and non-controversial. However, it is not clear what a "thorough assessment of gastrointestinal function" entails (Recommendation 4.1.4c), and whether the authors recommend this for each and every child with ASD, in the presence or absence of symptoms.

If the authors do intend to recommend a "thorough assessment of gastrointestinal function" for each and every child with ASD, this has substantial resource implications and therefore this recommendation needs clarification.

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