

Doctors Offices Surveyed on Autism Screening | CPD



Autism spectrum disorder continues to be the fastest-growing developmental disability in Utah. A survey of doctors' offices in Cache, Box Elder and Rich counties seeks to further understand ASD diagnoses by asking how and when northern Utah physicians screen for autism.

The survey will determine how doctors' offices inform parents about autism and its symptoms, and what follow-up actions they take if they suspect a child has the disorder. Its authors stress that early diagnosis of children with ASD/DD will improve a child's development and performance at school. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention agree that evidence-based, structured and intensive educational intervention helps children with autism reach their greatest potential.

The doctor survey is part of a larger effort to implement Utah's State Plan for Improving Outcomes for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) and other Developmental Disabilities. Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities and the Utah Department of Health's Children with Special Health Care Needs agency are cooperating on the survey. It will begin in March, and its results will be made public.

"Fifteen to twenty years ago, it was generally believed that you weren't going to get major improvements in children diagnosed with autism," said Dr. Dennis Odell, director of biomedical services at the Center for Persons with Disabilities. Today, that conventional wisdom is changing. "We've had some children at two [years old] that at the time they were diagnosed, were clearly autistic. By the time they were six, the diagnosis could no longer be made because of intensive interventions."

Odell specializes in the evaluation and treatment of problems related to developmental disabilities. He does research into the causes of autism and treats children with ASD in his practice.

Cases still vary, he said. Some children with ASDs continue to struggle, and struggle profoundly. Still, they can make improvements with early treatment.

ASD usually manifests itself by age three, and is characterized by significant problems in getting along with others and communicating. Children with the disorder may have unusual behaviors and learning patterns.

The reported prevalence of ASD in Utah has risen twentyfold in twenty years, according to a study released in 2007 by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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