Family Practice Based Interventions to Reduce Stress in Parents

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Family Practice Based Interventions to Reduce Stress in Parents of Children with Autism

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Abstract

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a group of neurodevelopmental disorders typically diagnosed before the age of three that affect the child's behavior, communication, and social skills. Although a pediatric neuropsychologist often confirms a diagnosis of this disorder, the primary care provider is highly involved in the ongoing care of the autistic child. It is well researched that parenting a child with ASD is correlated with high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, and it is not uncommon for the parent of a child with ASD to be a patient of the family practice as well. While the current interventions for the child with ASD vary, they improve the child's social outcomes, there are few programs in place beyond “support group” to address the specific mental health needs of the parent caring for a child with ASD. This research asks how a family-practice-based peer support group with rotations of primary caregivers, nursing staff, occupational/physical therapists, and mental health counselors compared to standard ASD intervention alone affects the stress experienced by parents of children with autism over a one-year period. A literature search was performed in PubMed, The Cochrane Library, Scopus, Eric and PsycINFO using the terms primary care, family practice, pediatric care, autism, autism spectrum disorder, stress, parental stress and support yielded a high number of articles that were narrowed to 12 current, relevant articles, 6 of which were kept for a literature review. The outcomes of these studies were reviewed, compared, and summarized, and it was concluded that although the interventions examined in the literature varied in modality, length, and setting, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that the above mentioned intervention would result in decreased stress in parents of children with ASD. Further research is needed to determine how best to determine which modes of intervention are most appropriate for specific stress triggers.

Research Question

Among parents of children aged 2-18 diagnosed with ASD, how does a family-practice-based peer support group with rotations of primary care providers, nursing staff, occupational/physical therapists, and mental health counselors compared to standard ASD intervention alone affect the stress experienced by parents of children with autism over a one year period?

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Study</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCT</td>
<td>Peer lead/face to face interactions with parents</td>
<td>Decrease in parental stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCT</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral therapy provided by pediatrician, nurse coordinator, scheduling coordinator</td>
<td>Decrease in parental stress and depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quasi-experimental</td>
<td>Individualized primary care medical home provided by pediatrician, nurse coordinator, scheduling coordinator</td>
<td>Improved parent-child relationship with multidisciplinary, focused care. No specific results regarding parental stress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

- Parents have individual needs in dealing with the stress of parenting a child with ASD.
- Personalization and multiple modalities of support are beneficial in reducing parental stress and increasing overall well-being in the setting of parenting a child with ASD.
- A family practice in which the parent and child are both patients of the same provider or team of providers is an ideal setting to implement a support group.
- There is sufficient evidence to suggest that a family-practice-based peer support/education group with rotations of medical providers, mental health providers and therapists may reduce stress in parents of children with ASD.
- Future research indicated in the most beneficial types of interventions and the best way to integrate this care into standard medical practice.