

# Training on early identification and diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders in children: evaluation and continuing mentorship

Project Summary

Centre for Leadership in Child Development

Melanie Penner, Jessica Brian, Anne Kawamura, Jennifer Kong, & Lana Andoni

**Holland Bloorview**

Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

**Bloorview**  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE



## SHARING OUR WORK

Dr. Penner was invited to present an abbreviated version of the workshop as a breakout session at the 2015 Practical Pediatrics in Ontario conference. Her session was well-attended, with approximately 40 participants.

Further knowledge sharing activities are planned to target both subspecialists and general paediatricians, including liaising with local Children's Treatment Network centres and exploring larger venues, such as City-Wide Pediatric Rounds.

Finally, this work will influence future offerings of the workshop and evaluation.

## WHAT WAS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

This project evaluated a workshop designed to improve the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnostic skills of general pediatricians. The workshop was designed to teach general pediatricians how:

- to recognize ASD,
- to perform a diagnostic assessment, and
- to bill effectively.

It allowed them to practice communicating the diagnosis with actors playing parents, and gave them a list of necessary next steps after making the diagnosis. Twenty-four participants attended the workshop. Drs. Brian and Penner also made themselves available in the months after the workshop for ongoing mentorship.

## WHAT DID WE DO?

We performed a web-based survey to ask participants about the impact the workshop had on their practice. We also asked them if we could contact them for an in-depth interview about whether the workshop changed their practice. Eight participants were interviewed. All interview transcripts were reviewed by the study team to determine whether the workshop achieved its objectives.

## IMPACT FOR CLIENTS, FAMILIES AND CLINICAL PRACTICE

This work has helped us to refine our efforts to encourage general pediatricians to diagnose ASD in their practices, as well as telling us about how we need to empower and equip them to do this work. By encouraging general pediatricians to diagnose ASD, we hope to increase diagnostic capacity throughout the system, which means less waiting time for all children awaiting an ASD diagnosis. This will help families to access necessary interventions when their children are at a younger age.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The in-depth interviews told us that participants fell into three categories: 1) Participants who were already diagnosing ASD in their practices (5 of the 8 participants interviewed); 2) Participants who started diagnosing ASD as a result of attending the workshop (2 of the 8 participants interviewed); and 3) Participant who continued not diagnosing ASD after the workshop (1 of the 8 participants interviewed).

- Many participants already diagnosed ASD prior to coming to the workshop. Of these, many described value in attending the workshop; it made them feel more confident, let them know that their peers were also diagnosing ASD, gave them approval from experts for their practice, and allowed them access to experts.
- Two participants started performing ASD assessments after attending the workshop. These participants described a change of perspective about whether ASD diagnosis was something they could do. They felt empowered to be able to help families access resources faster. They found that the tools presented were helpful in making ASD diagnosis a “reasonable” part of their practice.
- One participant did not perform ASD diagnoses before or after the workshop. This participant still did not feel comfortable saying that a child had ASD.

Overall, we learned that for general paediatricians to start doing ASD diagnoses in their practices, they need to feel that this change is reasonable and supported by both peers and experts. Attitudes toward ASD play a big role, and broader education targeting general paediatricians is needed about necessary elements for diagnosis.

## NEXT STEPS

1. Liaise with regional developmental subspecialists to discuss local attitudes of this group toward general paediatrician diagnosis, ensuring that there is local “expert approval.”
2. Investigate educational opportunities directed toward a broader audience to introduce general paediatricians to the idea that ASD diagnosis can be in their scope of practice.
3. Use the information we have obtained to help us plan another offering of the workshop.
4. Investigate innovated media platforms to provide ongoing mentorship that is secure and easily accessible.

## WHO ARE WE?

- Melanie Penner is a developmental paediatrician and health services researcher at Holland Bloorview.
- Jessica Brian is a clinical psychologist and a researcher at Holland Bloorview.
- Anne Kawamura is a developmental paediatrician and medical education researcher at Holland Bloorview.
- Jennifer Kong and Lana Andoni are research assistants at Holland Bloorview.

## THANK YOU!

Thank you to all our participants. Thank you to Julie Chiba Branson, Pam Green, Salina Eldon, and Shawn Kao for their assistance in delivering the workshop.