Autism Spectrum Disorder
by Lisa Joseph, Latha Soorya, and Audrey Thurm. In book series:
Advances in Psychotherapy—Evidence-Based Practice. Hogrefe

First described in the early 1940s, autism was thought to be a
rare disorder, with a prevalence of 1 in 2,500 to 4,000. In the past
several decades, in part because of an expansion of the symptom
concept of autism, its prevalence has exploded to a rate of almost
1% of the population. While a full understanding of the syndrome
must await better delineation of the genetics and pathophysiology
of the “social brain,” advances in our knowledge of the nature and
development of social communication, and of its failure to develop,
have afforded us an initial toehold to explore what is fundamental
to the disorder. Autistic symptoms may be seen in the first year of
life, they vary in severity from mild to severe, and in a few instances
they may improve over time, even without treatment. Social and
behavioral interventions can be useful in increasing social skills
and communication. Pharmacologic intervention may primarily
help to alleviate other symptoms often found in persons with
autism: severe anxiety, aggressive outbursts, attention deficits, and
hypersensitivity to sensory input.

What is most important today is that parents, educators,
pediatricians, and the general public be aware of recent advances
in our understanding of autism. This book is an excellent primer
on the subject. It is practical, succinct, accurate, and inclusive
in its review of what is current in the field. It is a book for busy
clinicians who do not have time to wade through out-of-date
textbook chapters and hundreds of articles in the general literature
to gain an appreciation of what will help them in their everyday
work with students or patients. The authors are aware of what has
been identified on the pathophysiology of autism (limited as these
findings may be), but, most important, they know the diagnostic
and the treatment issues from firsthand experience.

Each chapter concludes with a succinct case summary
illustrating the salient features of autism as revealed in the chapter
text. Chapter 2 lists the most popular screening and diagnostic
instruments for assessing social communication and language
disorder as well as the ancillary symptoms often seen in autism.
Those instruments that are practical for use in the clinic are noted;
those that are best for research are singled out.

Chapters 3 and 4, which comprise the bulk of the text, discuss
treatment. I was pleased to see that several of the behavioral
treatments have been studied sufficiently that their strengths and
weaknesses can be stated with some degree of confidence.

The book concludes with a list of more than 200 references,
many published in 2010 or later.

Altogether, this is an excellent primer on autism spectrum
disorder.

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