

With the generous support of Autism Ontario, I had the opportunity to attend the 10th annual International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) in San Diego, California. As a first year Master student in Clinical-Developmental Psychology, I appreciated the breadth of topics covered by the keynote speakers, educational symposia, oral presentations and poster sessions. It was an exciting experience to learn about the current international advancements in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) research, and I greatly benefited from exposure to the vast array of research methodology, design, and theoretical foundations used in this field of interest.

During the conference, I had the opportunity to attend an educational symposium entitled "Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Challenges for Epidemiological and Outcome Research" moderated by Dr. Patricia Howlin. Dr. Howlin and colleagues highlighted the limited state of quality research pertaining to adults with ASD. In particular, there is little knowledge about prevalence in adulthood, randomized controlled trials of psychological interventions for adults, and factors related to positive adult outcomes. While there have been significant advancements in research involving children with ASD, the developmental trajectory from childhood to adulthood remains vastly understudied.

In examination of adult outcomes, Dr. Marsha Seltzer described her study using data from a 10-year longitudinal study involving 406 individuals aged 10-52. Dr. Seltzer studied age-related changes in health, medications, and adult outcomes in individuals with ASD as compared to nationally representative samples of individuals with Down Syndrome, and individuals without a developmental disability. Her results indicated that adults with ASD were significantly more likely to be in poor health and less likely to be in excellent health than individuals without a developmental disability. Individuals with ASD demonstrated a rapid decline in health and increase in prescriptions after the age of 45. Further, adults with ASD who did not have an intellectual disability had better adult outcomes than adults with ASD and an intellectual disability, or adults with Down Syndrome. Individuals with ASD have heterogeneous life-long care needs, and the work of Drs. Seltzer and Howlin emphasized the need for further research in this area.

I was also able to present a poster on Emergency Department Utilization by Adolescents and Adults with ASD through my work with Dr. Yona Lunsky at the Dual Diagnosis Research Program at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. This proved to be an exciting and beneficial learning experience, allowing me to interact with a wide audience of students, researchers and professionals. Overall, attending IMFAR allowed me to enhance my professional growth and furthered my interest in ASD research. I sincerely thank Autism Ontario for enabling me to attend, and I look forward to attending IMFAR 2012.

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