

Report by:

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First, I would like to thank Autism Ontario and everyone who donated to the Together for Autism campaign for providing funding for students to attend the International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) in London. As a doctoral student nearing the end of my training in clinical-developmental psychology, being able to attend IMFAR was an invaluable experience. I had the opportunity to present my research in an international forum and meet other scientists and scientists-in-training from around the world.

The meeting has contributed a great deal to informing my next stage of research. My doctoral project is about girls with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), so I was thrilled to meet several other researchers who also are doing work about the specific profiles and needs of girls and women on the spectrum. As research in the field grows at a rapid pace, it is very important to know about related research at the earliest time so research can be coordinated and non-redundant. As a result of meeting these other researchers, I was invited to join a special interest group for female-specific autism research. This will hopefully lead to collaborations that will contribute to this area of research more rapidly and in a more in-depth manner.

Just attending the conference provided several great learning experiences. I have a great deal of interest in the identification of ASD and mental health problems in clinically

complex individuals. Being able to attend a Roundtable meeting to learn about the state-of-the-science in diagnosis from the developers of the best assessment tools was incredibly valuable for planning future research projects. Many of these assessment tools are quite expensive and take a lot of training, so to find out how they compare to each other and what special function each serve was very helpful. Additionally, learning about assessment tools used in other parts of the world, helped me to broaden my North American-centric training perspective. For example, I learned about the Diagnostic Interview for Social and Communication Disorders (DISCO) that can be used to diagnose ASD in adults even if parent report is not available and is able to provide diagnosis for other related disorders like ADHD. Also, the designers of the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) have developed a new assessment for less verbal toddlers.

Considering that my program of research is branching out into the area of mental health in ASD, it was encouraging to see several posters in what has been a relatively limited area of research so far. Researchers from Sweden presented work on the misdiagnosis and the actual occurrence of psychosis in ASD. A group from the Czech Republic described characteristics of individuals with Asperger's syndrome who benefit most from psychotherapy. Another group of Swedish

researchers were able to identify adults with ASD who had been misdiagnosed as having Borderline Personality Disorder. Researchers from the US have modified a classic psychiatric interview so that it can be used to reliably identify mental health problems in children with ASD. Overall, it seems that there is a growing interest in the mental health of individuals with ASD which means that I will have more background to draw from as I create studies to investigate areas of greatest need for people with ASD and mental health problems.

Probably one of the most exciting developments for research in autism is the increased cooperation of scientists to advance science. Groups doing research in genetics and with baby siblings are providing great examples of working collaboratively and pooling their resources across the world to speed up research findings so that families and individuals can benefit sooner from their work. Getting the benefits of research to the community is really the most important part of research and I am so thrilled to be a part of this exciting time in ASD research. Thank you again for the opportunity to be a part of it.