Message from Issue Editor

Issue Theme: Autism

Raymond W S Chan

The current issue is on autism, a childhood disorder that is increasingly common and yet our understanding of it remains very limited despite our knowing of it for over seventy years. The most recent released prevalence rate of autism is 14.7/1,000 (United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USA, 2014), a big contrast to an estimate of 0.5/1,000 when I first started seeing children with autism thirty years ago. The reasons for the almost thirtyfold increase over the decades remain speculative. The recent release of DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) has given some new definitions to autism. The disorder is now named as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and placed under Neurodevelopmental Disorders. Social impairments and behavioural difficulties and not language are considered to be the defining features. Using a developmental rather than a fixed-age perspective in evaluating the impairments is adopted. On the other hand, advances in brain and genetic studies have broadened our understanding on the etiologies of ASD. Despite all these increases in understanding, we are still struggling with the big question: What are the effective interventions for ASD? In this issue, there are five quality papers on local studies attempting to answer this question.

Social impairments have been regarded as a core deficit of ASD. What is the implication of this for intervention? In the discussion paper entitled "Social competence as the centrality of intervention for autism spectrum disorder (ASD): why and how?" Chan, Lo & Tang have advocated the importance of placing social competence training as a priority intervention for ASD. Along this thinking, Yau et al. have reported a 3-year project on "Developing social competence among high-functioning youth with autism spectrum disorders: A pilot experience in Hong Kong". The obtained significant positive results have shown support to the benefit of social training for ASD in adolescence. Apart from social intervention, Mok and Chung have shared their experience in using the DIR/Floortime Model to work with very young children with ASD in a local psychiatric setting. This approach places an emphasis on emotional development, training through child-lead play and involvement of parents. Though the successful application of the model locally is still waiting for further evidence, it has highlighted the importance of family in the intervention process. In this issue, a study by Cheung et al., using the family needs questionnaire, parents of preschoolers with ASD have indicated a great number of unmet service needs, mostly centered around children. This widens the service gaps which families of children with ASD have to tackle. For service providers, it is also a challenge to meet the needs of families in caring their children. Oftentimes, parents with children with ASD are also highly distressed and thus affecting their effort and skills in parenting. In her paper on "An Evaluation of a Parent Emotion Management Group (PEMG) for

Message from Issue Editor

Highly Distressed Parents of Children with Disabilities", Chan has described how the use of CBT and mindfulness/relaxation training has successfully reduced the depression and anxiety of the parents, most of whom have children with ASD.

With this richness in content, I hope this special issue will not only increase our understanding of ASD but stimulate our thought to the question of how people with ASD can be better served.

References

American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

United States Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (2014). Prevalence of autism spectrum disorder among children aged 8 years - Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network, 11 sites, United States, 2010. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR),* Surveillance Summaries, March 28, 2014/63(SS02);1-21.

Upcoming Themes

The Hong Kong Journal of Mental Health is the official publication of the Mental Health Association of Hong Kong and is published on a half-yearly basis. It is an interdisciplinary journal intended to serve as a focal point for the exchange of information to both enhance the definition and development of the field of mental health and facilitate the applications of facts, principles, and methods derived from psychology, psychiatry, medicine, sociology, epidemiology, anthropology, social work, nursing, education and other health-related disciplines.

The Editorial Board has suggested several upcoming themes including (but not limited to) the following:

♦ Old Age Mental Health
♦ Research in Mental Health
♦ Dementia

Manuscript submission should be sent to
Mr. Stephen Sun
Chief Editor, Hong Kong Journal of Mental Health
c/o The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong
2 Kung Lok Road, Kwun Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China
E-mail: mhahkho@mhahk.org.hk