Autism Spectrum Disorder: A guide for Reception Staff

Autism (or ASD) is a social communication disorder that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people. It is often associated with over sensitivity to everyday things like noise, smells or lighting. This can make it very difficult for the person with autism to access healthcare. There are a number of simple things that you as reception staff can do to make this better.

Top Tips
- Arrange autism awareness training for the whole team
- Make sure the practice has an up-to-date register of all those with ASD
- Ensure that the reasonable adjustments a person needs to access the surgery are clearly highlighted on the records

Communication
Both verbal and non-verbal communication may be different in those with ASD. You can assist in many ways by
- Speaking calmly and clearly in short sentences using as few words as possible
- Waiting longer for answers to questions as the person may be slower to process a response. Do not rush to rephrase the question as this may confuse further
- Keeping language as literal as possible as jokes, metaphors and sarcasm can be confusing
- Checking that the person really understands what you have said
- Being patient as autism is often associated with anxiety and difficulty recognizing the significance of symptoms such as pain
- No eye contact does not mean the person is not listening. Start a question by saying their name so they know it is directed at them
- The person may inadvertently cause offense by their blunt honesty and very literal interpretation of what has been said. Equally they may take offense by misinterpreting your comments – again be patient

Housekeeping

- Consider a patient alert that recognizes the person is autistic and needs particular care or adjustments
- Ensure carers are identified on the practice computer
- Ask about reasonable adjustments with all new registrations
- Explain clearly, and preferably also in writing, the process of making appointments, prescriptions or other enquiries
- Make sure any referrals to other services (such as district nurses or transport) includes the information about the diagnosis and reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments

Consider reasonable adjustments - these are the steps needed to allow equitable access for anyone with additional needs. For those with ASD this may mean

- Longer appointments
- The first or last appointment of the surgery
- Somewhere quiet to wait, or to be called in from outside
- Seeing the same clinician whenever possible
- Consider having a named health navigator at the practice who can be first point of contact for the patient
- Offer alternative means of contact such as email, text or on-line appointment booking
- If you offer a drop-in and wait surgery please consider giving the patient with autism (or indeed anyone with additional needs) priority to reduce the amount of time they have to wait.