

IASSID European Regional Congress

Athens 17-20 July 2018

The 5th European Regional Congress for the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IASSID) held in Athens, Greece in July 2018 brought together experts in the field of learning disabilities. With the support of FPSA I successfully presented my clinical audit project titled: "Monitoring the physical health of children with learning disabilities prescribed antipsychotics."

This conference provided an opportunity to learn from world-renowned experts in areas of education and health related to young people with intellectual disability. The key note speakers included inspiring talks about mental health research for young people with intellectual disabilities and how to help these individuals with their sense of belonging and developing autonomy. As a pediatrician in my final year of training, and soon to be career consultant community pediatrician I care for children and adolescents with both long-term physical and mental health problems. The management of children and adolescents with neurodevelopmental disorders, which include intellectual disability is an ever-changing field and requires up-to-date scientific knowledge in order to advocate and treat our patients to the best of our ability. I regularly see adolescents aged 11-18 years with face-to-face contact at least three times a week during clinical practice. My work being presented at this conference allowed the relatively young local tertiary level service to be presented on the world stage and hopefully support our call for expansion of the service. As a pediatrician working alongside psychiatrists this project has allowed multidisciplinary working to ensure the expertise of both pediatricians and psychiatrists prescribing antipsychotic medication and providing physical and mental health care for these individuals is aimed towards the national standard recommended for practice.

The conference took place over three and a half days and was full of fascinating talks and workshops. My work often involves the long-term care of children and adolescents with known and emerging genetic syndromes. These are often associated with mental health difficulties and adolescence can be a particularly difficult time for them. I benefitted from attending the workshops covering this area through gaining new knowledge. I learnt that gender can affect mental health expression in Fragile X syndrome, with boys displaying increased rates of ADHD and ASD, compared to girls with social phobia and anxiety. Gender also affected families concerns around adolescence and transition to adulthood. Parents of male patients were more concerned about mental health problems, compared to parents of girls' concerns about visibility of the disability and lack of independence.

This has led me consider my own practice and if I fully assess girl's mental health needs, as they may be less visible but still have a strong impact on their quality of life.

Rubinstein-Taybi Syndrome was also discussed. I learnt that adolescence is a time of considerable shift for these patients. When younger, these children are often viewed as very friendly and happy. At adolescence mood difficulties can become apparent and self-regulation can be difficult. I plan on reviewing my practice, to consider if I adequately prepare parents for the adolescent stage directly related to mental health.

Tuberous Sclerosis Complex and associated behavioural dysregulation was also a topic discussed with novel research shared. I have cared for several children with such a clinical diagnosis. New research indicates that intellectual disability is decreasing in this population as their epilepsy is better controlled. This made me feel positive about the research that has been done on this and similar conditions and the progress we are making. Hyperactivity and impulsivity are still significant problems for this patient group. Comorbid ADHD is often present but is often not fully managed with pharmacological treatments. This has led some researchers to consider if ADHD symptoms in patients with Tuberous Sclerosis have a different aetiology and may respond to different treatment. For now, I plan to increase the psychoeducation I provide families and carers around ADHD symptoms and keep up to date with this research as it develops.

I would like to thank the FPSA for the opportunity to learn about the cutting-edge research in mental health and intellectual disability. I was truly humbled by the work been carried out around the continent and am excited to be part of professional group that will see radical shifts in practice through the encouragement to research practise and share experiences on a worldwide scale.

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