

RESEARCH SUMMARY:

Developmental-Behavioral Pediatricians Complete Comprehensive Evaluations for ASD, but Vary in the Tests They Use

What can families expect when their child is referred to a developmental-behavioral pediatrician because of a concern about autism? This study asked 56 developmental-behavioral pediatricians at 12 academic medical centers across the United States to complete a survey right after a clinic visit in which they diagnosed a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The survey included questions about the steps taken as part of the evaluation to make the diagnosis, other healthcare professionals involved in making the diagnosis, and tests used to understand the possible cause of the child's autism.

Most developmental-behavioral pediatricians made the diagnosis of ASD after reviewing and discussing parent-completed questionnaires about child development and behavior, as well as completing developmental and ASD-specific testing with the child during one or more visits. Although there were differences across the sites in what testing was done and by whom, most of the time the testing was completed by the developmental-behavioral pediatrician. The majority of children given an ASD diagnosis were also given another co-occurring diagnosis, and almost one-third were given two, such as speech/language disorders, intellectual disability, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and sleep disorders. Most developmental-behavioral pediatricians recommended genetic testing to determine possible causes of ASD.

Future studies will try to identify which assessment practices are most efficient but accurate, so that we can decrease the wait time for diagnosis and treatment that many families face when their child is referred for an autism assessment.

Reference:

Hansen RL, Blum NJ, Gahman A, Shults J, for the DBPNet Steering Committee. Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders by Developmental-Behavioral Pediatricians in Academic Centers: A DBPNet Study. *Pediatrics*. 2016 Feb;137(S2):s79-s89. PMID: 26908481