

Caring for Autistic Pediatric Patients Through Nurses' Eyes

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Abstract

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is associated with but not limited to a core triad of impairments, including impaired social communication, impaired social and emotional interactions, and rigidity of thought and behavior. Per the CDC, as of 2014, 1 in 68 children are affected by ASD. The purpose of this research project was to examine the experiences of pediatric nurses to better understand the status of acute care for autistic children from a patient-provider perspective. The author conducted phenomenological interviews to assess pediatric nurses' knowledge and perspectives about ASD. The six participants identified themes that affect the care of autistic patients, including nonspecific clinical presentations, insufficient nursing training, systemic failure of the American healthcare system, the importance of family, and the necessity of tailoring care to individual needs. Participants recognized that "letting the patient lead" resulted in therapeutic outcomes with patients. Barriers to care largely stemmed from systemic factors, including insufficient resources, inadequate education, lack of collaboration, and the chronicity of the disorder. The pediatric autistic population may be underserved and not fully understood by healthcare providers. The results accentuate the need to better educate nurses about how to best care for pediatric patients with autism, empower patients and their families, and implement systemic changes.

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