

The perceptions of parents regarding the effectiveness of short term, intensive occupational therapy for newly diagnosed children with autism spectrum disorders in a tertiary hospital in South Africa: a case study

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At a tertiary hospital, referred children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) should be provided with specialist occupational therapy (OT) assessment and intervention, as necessary. Thereafter patients should be referred to district or primary care level. Poor compliance with therapy appointments results in a delay of referral, increasing patient case load and waiting times for new referral appointments.

The objectives are to evaluate the perceptions of parents of children with ASD, who received short term intensive, specialized OT (block therapy) at a tertiary level before referral to district and primary care level, and to furthermore gather recommendations for improvement of this intervention program.

Block therapy at Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital includes six specialized sessions. A focus group will be held in December 2017, which will include four to six parents and will be aimed at collecting subjective data regarding their experiences of the process.

Research shows that early, intensive intervention is more effective and beneficial than irregular, delayed therapy. It is anticipated that the implementation of block therapy should increase parent satisfaction, learning and compliance with therapy. Therefore, facilitating earlier referral to district and primary level, to continue long term therapy, and providing opportunities for newly diagnosed cases to be managed at tertiary level.

There is a need for more research with regards to the role and value of OT in a tertiary hospital in the management of children with ASD. The effectiveness of regular, intensive early intervention therapy should be further explored in future studies.