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Editorial

Autism spectrum disorders; towards excellence in care, social integration and rights protection

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) have an impact on different human attributes - communication, learning, behaviour, and interaction as social beings. Although autism used to be considered as a single entity, now it is recognised as a spectrum of disorders with a broad variation in the presentations. Affected subjects may present to a paediatrician, a psychiatrist or a neurologist. The spectrum includes the Asperger syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, and pervasive developmental disorders not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).

In their study published in this issue of *GMJ*, Yashica de Silva and S. Wijesekera focus on the quality of life (QoL) of 8- to 12-year-old children with ASD from the perspective of caregivers. The study identifies poor QoL in different domains.

Should the clinicians, caregivers and the community merely go on looking at those with ASD in sympathy or act proactively and work for their integration to the society? Children / individuals with ASD should not be looked at as “differently able” as it is in vogue today. They are a part of the society at large and they enrich and contribute to the rich mosaic of societal diversity. Unfortunately, it has been recognised that people with ASD are subjected to stigma, discrimination and human rights violations. As such all stakeholders should work in unison for the social integration of the ASD-affected.

Together with many national groups all over the world, the World Health Organization (WHO) has come to the forefront to campaign for the care and integration of this group of subjects. The WHO calls for care for people with ASD to be accompanied by actions at community

and societal levels for greater accessibility, inclusivity and support. These requirements are highlighted in the *World Health Assembly resolution WHA 67.8: Comprehensive and coordinated efforts for the management of autism spectrum disorders*.

When we in Sri Lanka and the world “celebrate” the World Autism Awareness Day on 2nd April each year, all should go into action beyond the rhetoric of a passive celebration - to achieve excellent QoL, social integration and human rights protection of subjects with ASD.

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