

Autism Awareness: an IPNA story

Unhurried pitter-patter of little feet, faint coos from a mum's lap, atmosphere loaded with giggles; this is probably how most of us sketch parenthood. But sometimes life has more in store with beautiful children needing a little more attention than what is anticipated. Autism – a term relatively unknown to most Bangladeshi parents even a few years ago has become worryingly rampant today, especially with the media disseminating information and awareness extensively.



Every parent of a child who misses their developmental milestone is slightly anxious, worrying that their worst fear might come true, but autism is hardly an endemic to the 21st century.

Autism, a spectrum disorder, has always been present, but it was not properly comprehended, especially because of the lack of knowledge, and also, because most people suffering from autism look no different than any of us. The traits were simply over-looked, simplified and labelled as quirky behaviour that could not be managed.

EARLY INTERVENTION CHANGES THE SCENARIO

Dr Nahid Nabi, consultant neurologist, Institute of Paediatric Neurodisorder and Autism (IPNA) at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) helped us understand better.

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Autism, as we know it, is a spectrum disorder, ranging from mild to higher-order anomaly. We sought special understanding of the stipulation and what parents of both ends of the spectrum could expect in the case of their children.

"Well, I just want to be very clear about another issue – not all communication disorder should be labelled as autism. And all children who miss their developmental milestones are not

autistic. The term is slightly more complex than our common understanding," expressed the doctor.

Referring to parents who work full time and outside home, she depicts their inability to spend quality time with the children, as a result of which, the children are exposed to inattentive caregivers or gadgets with zero interac-

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tion in the eye during any sort of communication.

According to the doctor, when parents fear their children are not growing up at a normal pace, they address doctors who take special tests.

"At 16 to 30 months, we take the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (MCHAT) survey, with 20 set questions. If the patient fails to meet the criteria and is highly suggestive of autism, we begin the intervention, but if they are in the mild to moderate spectrum, we train the parents with some early intervention tools and ask them to come again after the second birthday to take part in the tests again. Luckily, many of the children pass the tests with flying colours the second time, especially after intense early intervention by parents back home.

"On the other hand, if children still show some lacking, we do another assessment with DSM- 5, (a special set questionnaire). If any child fails to meet the criteria based on the survey, they are finally diagnosed with autism, and a treatment plan (autism management) is drawn up, different for every child," portrays the child behaviour-disorder specialist.

The next question raised is the future prospect of the children acknowledged as autistic. According to the specialists, the mild to moderately autistic children, with appropriate and timely intervention, can lead a normal life with admission to mainstream schools. In the case of the higher-end disorders,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



রাধুনি'র সুবিধাজনক জার যার যেভাবে দরকার

সরাসরি ঢালা, কাঁটায় কাঁটায় মাপমতো নেয়া বা রিফিলের স্বাচ্ছন্দ্য-যার যেভাবে দরকার সেভাবে ব্যবহারের সুবিধা নিয়ে দেশের ১ নম্বর গুঁড়া মশলা রাধুনি এখন আলট্রাভায়োলেট-রে প্রফ দারণ এক জারে।



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