

Screening and Diagnosis of Autism in Children in Primary Care - A Narrative Review on the Topic

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Abstract:

Introduction: Early autism screening and diagnosis are critical priorities worldwide to improve outcomes for affected individuals and reduce the associated financial and health burdens. However, timely recognition and diagnosis remain challenging, delaying intervention at an early age. Family physicians play a pivotal role as they are often the first—and sometimes the only—medical professionals accessible to underserved communities. **Objective:** To highlight the role of family physicians in autism screening and diagnosis within primary care on a global scale. **Methods:** A narrative review of available literature was conducted using databases such as the Brazilian Ministry of Health, Virtual Health Library (BVS), and National Library of Medicine (PUBMED). **Results:** Early screening for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is recommended from 18 months of age, with reevaluation at 24–30 months using the M-CHAT-R/F tool. While effective, implementation is hindered by low adherence among family physicians and challenges with post-screening referrals. Training and integrating screening tools into electronic health records have shown promise. Early diagnosis and timely interventions improve outcomes but require expanded healthcare resources. **Conclusions:** Family physicians play a vital role in autism screening, diagnosis, and referral, leveraging their accessibility and longitudinal care.

Keywords:

Autism, Screening, Family Medicine, Primary Care.