Autistic Doctors International

Our Stories

We exist

(You might be one of us)
The Autistic Doctor
@AutisticDoctor


📍 Ireland 🌐 facebook.com/AutisticDoctor... 🗓 Joined September 2018

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“I’ve always been autistic. I didn’t know this as a child, when I was utterly obsessed with the human body and determined to be a doctor, nor as a young adult struggling through medical school and the training years.

How did I get to be a consultant anaesthetist in my mid 40s before anyone realised?”
Autistic Doctors
Not an Oxymoron

Dr Shirley Moore
Dr Mary Doherty
The Autistic Doctor
@AutisticDoctor

Medicine selects for Aspie traits. Lots of us actually meet the criteria for diagnosis. All is good until demands exceed capacity to cope, then the wheels fall off. ASD should be specifically considered when doctors present in difficulty.

@aspiedoc1 @Psychautismcham

6:47 PM · Feb 27, 2019 · Twitter Web Client
Prevalence

- Gen pop ~ 1%
- GPs 1%
- GMC FTP 18 cases
- Autistic Doctors International 150+
- Expect at least 1-2%

“Once one has learnt to pay attention to the characteristics of autism, one realizes they are not at all rare”

• Hans Asperger
The authors report increasing numbers of neurodivergent doctors enquiring in established peer-support groups and the emergence of autism-specific support groups.
• General Practice
• Anaesthesia
• Internal medicine
• Psychiatry
• Public health
• Pathology
• Surgery
• Anxiety
• Transitions
• Sensory issues
• Information processing
• Executive functioning
• Communication challenges
• Difficulty accessing support
• Not aware of reasonable adjustments
• Educators/supervisors’ lack of knowledge of autism
The Autistic Doctor @AutisticDoctor

I love my job. Really looking forward to work tomorrow.

It's SO much easier to manage now I know I'm #actuallyautistic #medtwitter
10:05 PM · Feb 24, 2019 · Twitter Web Client

The Autistic Doctor @AutisticDoctor

Yep. #Andme
Severe depression, suicidal. Diagnosed autistic - Aha!!! That explained everything!
Doing great now, loving life, loving work, and I'm enjoying connecting other autistic doctors together.
10:20 AM · Apr 25, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

The Autistic Doctor @AutisticDoctor

At least I understand the dynamics of what's happening now. Before I knew I was autistic I'd have been so uncomfortable in this situation.
I'm so glad I know I'm #ActuallyAutistic!
1:26 PM · Mar 6, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone
My work colleagues have absolutely no idea the amount of effort it takes for me to act like part of the team.

#TotallyExhausted

5:14 PM · Mar 5, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone
Consequences of undiagnosed autism

• Personal distress
• Professional difficulties
• Career progression
• Change of career
• Stress leave
• Early retirement
• Physical & mental health
• Early mortality

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Same. Recognising that my mental health issues related to undiagnosed autism was the key for me. It’s easy to stay well now that I understand. Look out for autism, there’s lots of us undiagnosed in the MH services.

7:44 AM · Nov 18, 2018 · Twitter for iPhone
Impact of support group

- Mental ill health common
- Autism masquerades as...
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- OCD
- Eating Disorder
- Substance abuse
- Personality Disorder *BPD*
- ADHD/Dyslexia/Dyspraxia

- Positive effect on mental health
- Friendship
- Support with disclosure
- Support with conflicts at work

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The Autistic Doctor
@AutisticDoctor

Just off a fabulous Zoom marathon chat with the Autistic Doctors group.
5 hours before we ran out of steam!
Who is it that says we have difficulty communicating???
Autism: the positives

Understanding, embracing and celebrating different ways of thinking and doing can release the true power of the autistic mind. Here we look at the positive features of autism.

Attention to detail
- Thoroughness
- Accuracy

Deep focus
- Concentration
- Freedom from distraction

Observational skills
- Listen, look, learn approach
- Fact finding

Methodical approach
- Analytical
- Spotting patterns, repetition

Novel approaches
- Unique thought processes
- Innovative solutions

Creativity
- Distinctive imagination
- Expression of ideas
Absorb and retain facts
- Excellent long term memory
- Superior recall

Tenacity and resilience
- Determination
- Challenge opinions

Visual skills
- Visual learning and recall
- Detail-focused

Accepting of difference
- Less likely to judge others
- May question norms

Expertise
- In-depth knowledge
- High level of skills

Integrity
- Honesty, loyalty
- Commitment

⚠️ Remember
Every experience of autism is unique. No one person will identify with every positive feature of autism. We all have individual skills, attributes and characteristics that are as unique as our personalities – this is the power of neurodiversity.

Harriet Cannon
Disability Services, February 2018
“The world needs all kinds of minds.”

Dr. Temple Grandin B.A., M.S., Ph.D.
Medicine needs all kinds of minds.
Disorder or Diversity?

• 1972 APA

• “I am a homosexual”
• “I am a psychiatrist”
Robert Spitzer

• “The removal of “homosexuality” from DSM II in 1973 was engineered by Bob

• “The result of his single-minded and almost single-handed crusade to eliminate the psychiatric stigmatisation of difference.”
  • Allen Frances

• His other major accomplishment was to save psychiatry from a crisis of credibility

• Development of the DSM III & DSM III(R)
A particular sort of mind

• Obsessed with diagnostic reliability
• Developed software for computer assisted diagnosis (1965)
  • Worked on project for 6 years, 70 - 80 hrs/week in relative isolation
  • Never said hello to anyone
  • Failed to recognize colleagues faces
  • Failing to acknowledge people speaking directly to him
  • Few friends
  • Didn’t pick up on other’s internal states or perspectives
  • He treated everyone equally, without respect to rank or previous accomplishment
• Main goal – to operationalize the DSM criteria
• Main concern – a diagnosis had to fit, had to make sense, had to be logical
“He doesn’t understand people’s emotions. He knows he doesn’t. But that’s actually helpful in labelling symptoms. It provides less noise.

“He’s kind of an idiot savant of diagnosis—in a good sense, in the sense that he never tires of it”
- Allen Frances

“The DSM III was the product of a mind that exhibited many classic qualities of autistic intelligence.”
- Steve Silberman

(If you are an autism professional & haven’t read this, please do)
Challenge

- Stigma
- Unconscious bias
- Ableism
- Double Empathy Problem
  - Dr Damian Milton
- Resist tragedy narrative
- Be an ally

• “It seems that for success in science or art, a dash of autism is essential”
  - Hans Asperger

Asperger Syndrome

Autism Spectrum Condition
Benefit of Diagnosis

• Broken normal

• Self awareness

• Sensory challenges

• Social challenges – learn some skills

• Community support – find your tribe!

I didn't realise it could make a difference having peers with similar struggles from around the world sending messages of kindness.

Awareness of existing autistic staff as well as encouragement of diversity & inclusion in recruitment is just emerging. Expect at least 1%. Support aids retention in a group at high risk for burnout & early exit.

11:16 PM - 10 Apr 2019
Conclusion

- Beware knowledge gap
- Think beyond stereotypes
- Heterogeneous presentation
- Specialist advice

- Add autism to differential diagnosis
- Recognise and build on the benefits of autism
- Resist tragedy narrative
Thank you for listening!

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Autistic Doctors

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