Developing Autism Early Identification, Treatment and Research Strategies in Argentina

A. Rattazzi\textsuperscript{1}, K.A. Gutson\textsuperscript{1}, M.L. Massolo\textsuperscript{2}, C. Plebst\textsuperscript{1}, V. Enseñat\textsuperscript{1}, L.A. Croen\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}PANAACEA, Buenos Aires, Argentina \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{2}Kaiser Permanente Division of Research, Oakland, CA, U.S.A.

\textbf{Background}

The concept of public health is relatively new in Latin America and general knowledge about ASDs is poor. In Argentina, most of the trained clinicians, diagnostic and treatment resources, and medical infrastructure are centralized in the capital, Buenos Aires, and knowledge and resources in the interior of the country is largely lacking.

\textbf{Objectives}

Build infrastructure in Argentina at the local and national levels to:

1. Improve public and provider awareness of ASD
2. Implement best practices in screening, diagnosis and treatment of ASD
3. Develop and support ASD research

\textbf{Methods}

1. \textbf{Improve public and provider awareness of ASD}
   - Identify stakeholders and conduct a needs assessment to identify knowledge gaps, resource needs, and priority research questions
   - Conduct a structured survey of health and education professionals to examine knowledge about ASD, approaches to ASD diagnosis, and behaviors regarding referral to ASD services
   - Develop culturally relevant strategies for raising autism awareness in Argentina

2. \textbf{Conduct a demonstration ASD screening project}
   - In a typical city in the interior (Olavarría)
   - Utilize culturally relevant methods, e.g. Promotoras
   - Screen all toddlers (18 - 36 months) with M-CHAT through healthcare and educational settings
   - Conduct follow-up diagnostic assessment using ADDS, Mullen Scales of Early Learning and VABS-II
   - Establish ASD prevalence in young children

3. \textbf{Develop a model early intervention program}
   - “Train the trainer” model
   - Argentine co-investigators receive training on Early Start Denver Model (ESDM)
   - Conduct ESDM training for health professionals in Olavarría
   - Health professionals train parents
   - Feasible, generalizable and cost effective
   - Reach low resource and underserved populations

\textbf{Results}

- Autism Awareness month activities
- JDD training (130 professionals and special ed teachers trained in the Spanish version)
- Conexión Educativa autism TV program
- Media spots
- Working with parent groups and government on new legislation
- ESDM training in US in July 2012

\textbf{Conclusions}

This project addresses significant barriers to early identification, diagnosis and treatment of autism in Argentina by increasing public and professional awareness of autism spectrum disorders, increasing knowledge of public health research methodology, and providing training and expertise to health providers and educators in early identification and diagnosis. It will build infrastructure in Argentina for early identification and population based surveillance of children with ASDs which is necessary for future health planning initiatives, risk factor studies, and appropriate clinical interventions.