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Autism, a different reality - Case report

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The Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) represent a group of conditions, classified as a neurodevelopmental syndrome which affects the normal development of the child. The first signs tend to appear in the first three years of life and include three main areas of disturbance: social, behavioural e communicational. It is prevalent in an estimated 60/10,000 inhabitants. Currently, a reliable diagnosis of ASD can be established at 18-24 months of age, thus it is essential to identify the warning signs, as early as possible, for a more effective intervention and better prognosis for the child.

Male patient, 2 years of age, Caucasian who lives with his parents and twin sister. Child of normal (eutocic) childbirth after in-vitro fertilization, with an overall psychomotor development that has been within the normal range. The child was referred by his family doctor to a paediatric appointment due to the setback and regression in language, social isolation, disinterest in others and little social interaction. After being evaluated by paediatricians and therapists, autism was found to be the basic diagnosis hypothesis. Occupational therapy was started, with some results. The parents are still looking for more means of support

Usually children with autism have difficulty in using or understanding verbal and non-verbal language. Some have difficulty related to other people, things or events, including problems in making friends, difficulty in reading facial expressions and making eye contact. Typically, they also exhibit repetitive body movements or stereotyped behaviour, such as clapping their hands and echolalia.

Therefore, family doctors play a crucial role in ensuring for careful assessments in the suspicion of autism, through the detection of the first signs, the referral to a specialist, and by clarifying to the parents and caregivers what to expect. They also have an important role in integrating the family in the community, as they face a major challenge in adjusting their future plans and expectations to the day to day limitations in question. It is therefore essential to monitor not only the children concerned, but also the family, namely on a psychological, social and community level.