

**THROUGH AUTISTIC EYES: MAKING YOUR PRACTICE
AUTISTIC-FRIENDLY**

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Autism is a complex developmental condition, the core features of which include social and communication differences, a different style of thinking and processing information, and hypersensitivity to such things as sound, fluorescent lights, perfumes, light touch etc. Little surprise that many accounts by autistic people describe their experience of medical encounters as stressful, confusing or overwhelming, with risk of meltdowns, difficulty expressing their problems and grasping information given, and avoiding, or at best dreading, subsequent visits (Hudson, 2006; Beardon & Worton, 2011; Morton-Cooper, 2004). For the GP, these may be among your 'silent population' of non-attenders, or those considered 'difficult' patients (Morton-Cooper, 2004). Yet a practice with a list of 3000 patients, is likely to include some 45 autistic patients (Baird et al, 2000; Ehlers and Gillberg, 1993), including independent adults with Asperger's Syndrome (diagnosed or undiagnosed) attending without a support person.

This workshop explores ideas for adapting the ambience and interaction style, to enhance mutual understanding, render the GP visit a less confusing and distressing experience for all concerned, and ensure information and advice are presented in ways that autistic patients can more readily comprehend and apply. Useful tools and approaches used in medical facilities overseas will be demonstrated. Such resources, grounded in autism research, are little known here, but easily implemented in any general practice.

Ava Ruth speaks from autism experience on both sides of the desk: professionally as a GP specializing in working with autistic clients, and personally, from lived experience along with her own autistic friends, family and members of ASK Trust (a support group for autistic adults she co-founded).

After the conference in September 2012, Ava Ruth will be available to present an in-depth version of this to interested GP practices or other groups of professionals on request (contact arbak@clear.net.nz)