

Persons with Intellectual Disabilities 2

Dr Chiang Shu Hui Grace

SFP2023; 49(7)

Persons with intellectual disability (ID), their families, and carers should have access to high quality healthcare that meets their needs and enables them to lead active and healthy lives. However, significant barriers such as lack of formal training for healthcare providers, lack of awareness amongst healthcare providers, communication issues between providers and patients, and healthcare financing exist that prevent persons with ID from gaining greater access to quality healthcare and achievement of desired health outcomes.¹ Persons with ID experience more than twice the rate of avoidable deaths, twice the rate of emergency department and hospital admissions, significantly higher rates of physical and mental health conditions, and substantially lower rates of preventive healthcare.²

With the life expectancy of most persons with ID now approaching that of the general population,³ it is critical that collaborative action be taken to institute early and integrative management efforts to amalgamate the biological, psychological, social, and developmental dimensions of ID. The healthcare system needs to be reformed across disciplines to ensure that it meets the needs of persons with ID holistically to improve their healthcare outcomes. Such efforts will be critical in mitigating the symptoms of disability, preventing further deterioration, and improving quality of life.⁴⁻⁶ Family physicians can aid persons with ID with appropriate diagnosis; detecting and responding early to urgent medical issues; and providing appropriate health management, maintenance, and referral.

This issue of *Singapore Family Journal* will provide an update on intellectual disabilities and how family physicians can better support persons with ID, their families, and carers. The College is pleased to partner with the Ministry of Health, Singapore to conduct this Family Practice Skills Course for our doctors.

In Unit 1, Dr Giles Tan provides an overview of intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder, and how to differentiate between these two neurodevelopmental conditions.

In Unit 2, Dr Chen Shiling gives an approach on how one can identify mental health disorders and dementia in persons with ID.

In Unit 3, Ms Joy Teo highlights strategies that can be adopted to better facilitate communication between providers and persons with ID.

In Unit 4, Mr Tan Shen Kiat elaborates upon an approach that providers can adopt to ensure that mental capacity assessments are robust and accurate.

In Unit 5, Ms Wheeki Goh outlines the importance of future care planning among carers of persons with ID to better plan for their financial needs.

In Unit 6, Dr Seow Yujin provides an overview of how family physicians can better support patients with ID and their families in their clinics.

In this issue, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan has also selected ten current readings on topics related to "Persons with ID". These readings include articles on persons with ID and their comorbidities, support available overseas for persons with ID, and the impact of COVID-19 on persons with ID.

REFERENCES

1. National Council on Disability. The Current State of Health Care for People with Disabilities. 2009. Available from: <http://www.ncd.gov/publications/2009/Sept302009#HealthStatus>
2. Trollor, J. & Small, J. Health Inequality and People with Intellectual Disability – Research Summary. 2019
3. Coppus AM. People with intellectual disability: what do we know about adulthood and life expectancy? Developmental disabilities research reviews. 2013 Aug;18(1):6-16.
4. Lee K, Cascella M, Marwaha R. Intellectual Disability. StatPearls Publishing. 2020.
5. Wei KC, Lee C, Mahendran R, Lim CG. Improving mental health care for people with an intellectual disability in Singapore: bridging the health-social care divide. Singapore medical journal. 2012 Jul 1;53(7):428-32.
6. Dosen A. Integrative treatment in persons with intellectual disability and mental health problems. Journal of Intellectual Disability Research. 2007 Jan;51(1):66-74.
7. Kripke C. Adults with developmental disabilities: a comprehensive approach to medical care. American family physician. 2018 May 15;97(10):649-56.