UPDATES FROM THE SCATN...

• All participating practices are encouraged to obtain a copy of the AAP Autism Toolkit. The toolkit has valuable information and resources that will serve you in your practice with ASD children. The toolkit is available online from the American Academy of Pediatrics at http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/121/4/758.

• Remember, if you aren’t available to join us for our scheduled videoconsultations or are still awaiting your equipment, you can email your questions for the SCATN consultants to Elizabeth.Wilkinson@uscmed.sc.edu. Questions will be answered by the appropriate consultants (Dr. Hall and Elizabeth Wilkinson for Behavior & Resources; Dr. Abramson for Genetics; Dr. Wright & Dr. Holstrum for Psychopharmocology; and Dr. Kelly and Dr. Kinsman for Screening & Assessment) and the answers emailed back to you.

OF INTEREST IN AUTISM...

Among toddlers screened for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) by pediatricians using the M-CHAT, is there a group at higher risk for a positive M-CHAT screen? A highly informative article by Limeropoulos et al (2008), Positive Screening for Autism in Ex-preterm Infants: Prevalence and Risk Factors, Pediatrics 121(4): 758-765 provides an important alert for pediatricians who provide care for ex-preterm infants ≤ 1500 g at birth. With the increased survival of the sickest and most preterm infants has come the prevalence of significant lifelong motor, cognitive and behavioral dysfunction, including problems with social interaction, communication, behavior, attention and hyperactivity. In spite of the reported atypical psychosocial development in very low birth weight (VLBW) children, the prevalence of ASD has not been explored. The authors anecdotal experiences indicate they see a subgroup of ex-preterm infants with behaviors similar to those of children with ASD. The object of this study was to screen children with a history of VLBW for ASD and to identify risk factors associated with a positive screen to prompt appropriate referrals for ASD diagnostic testing.

The authors collected maternal and fetal demographic, prenatal, intrapartum, acute postnatal and short term outcome data on 91 ex-preterm infants. They completed conventional MRI studies at preterm and/or term-adjusted age. Follow-up assessments were performed at mean age 21.9 ± 4.7 months using the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT), the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale (VABS), and the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL).

A positive M-CHAT screen was found in 26% of the ex-preterm infants. The positive M-CHAT screen was highly correlated with internalizing behavior problems on the CBCL and socialization and communication deficits on the VABS. Risk factors significantly associated with the abnormal M-CHAT included lower birth weight, gestational age, male gender, chorioamnionitis, acute intrapartum hemorrhage, SNAP II score on admission, and abnormal MRI studies. Thus, the authors report a high prevalence of positive M-CHAT screens in a group of ex-preterm infants. They suggest that while these studies require corroboration in larger prospective studies and validation by diagnostic testing for ASD, the unusual social and behavioral profile may represent early signs of ASD. They stress the need for close follow-up of children with a positive screen. This is an easily read, excellent article.

See the full Article at: http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/121/4/758