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AUTISM AWARENESS: MISCONCEPTIONS AND MYTHS

The attention of Paediatric Society of Ghana (PSG) has been drawn to a video circulating on social media concerning Autism Spectrum Disorder. In the video interview, a mother describes her journey of Autism with her daughter. She mentions that she believes her daughter developed autism due to excessive oxygen in an incubator amongst other things. While we applaud the mother for her courage in sharing her experience with autism, the Paediatric Society of Ghana would like to take the opportunity to educate the public about Autism during this Awareness month.

The theme for World Autism Awareness Day 2025, which was on 2nd of April 2025, was "**Advancing Neurodiversity and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**". This theme highlights the intersection between neurodiversity and global sustainability efforts.

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects the way a child communicates, interacts with their peers and environment and it also affects their behavior. Now, better understood as a spectrum, there are no known causes of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), however genetic and environmental factors play a role. Some of the factors that may increase the risk of ASD include having a sibling with ASD, genetic or chromosomal conditions, very low birth weight, some maternal infections during pregnancy like Rubella amongst others. Unfortunately, the exact cause is still largely unknown for now.

There is a higher prevalence of ASD in boys. Boys are four times more affected than girls. Girls are often underdiagnosed with ASD and misdiagnosed with other conditions. Children with ASD have unique strengths and exceptional skills. The myths associated with ASD sometimes result in delays in care and poor outcomes.

The Paediatric Society of Ghana wishes to state as follows:

1. Babies may require oxygen as part of medical care. The reason for oxygen requirement such as prematurity (incubator needed in care) and birth asphyxia are risk factors for ASD but do not cause ASD.
2. ASD is a neurodevelopmental condition. It does not affect a child because they have been cursed or have received a vaccine.
3. Excessive screen time and screen addiction are notable factors that may be responsible for worsening the severity of ASD.
4. All Health workers, particularly those who take care of children, must be aware of ASD and offer appropriate care and referral.

Conclusion

The Paediatric Society of Ghana encourages all parents, religious leader, teachers, health and social workers and the general society that are concerned about a child's development, to report to the hospital as prompt and early intervention improves outcome. As a Society, we believe in neurodiversity amongst children in Ghana. Let us all get involved and create awareness, encourage early care seeking behaviour, improve outcomes and reduce stigma about ASD in our communities.



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