Patients with autism spectrum disorder make up a substantial portion of inpatient psychiatric admissions. According to the Autism Inpatient Collection (AIC) study, children with an ASD utilize 11.9 times as many psychiatric hospitalization days as children without an ASD. Most patients with ASD receive inpatient psychiatric treatment in general psychiatry units, which are not well suited for longer hospital stays. A study by Maloret & Scott (2014) identified how patients with ASD experience and cope with admission to an acute mental health facility.

**Background**

**Introduction**

- Patients with ASD see, hear and feel the world differently than those without ASD.
- It presents unique challenges for healthcare providers.
- An adolescent psychiatric fellow that has motivated me to look into the challenges of inpatient psychiatric hospitalization for patients with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

**Methods**

- A literature search was conducted on PubMed and Google Scholar using the keywords “autism”, “inpatient”, “psychiatric” and “hospitalization”.
- A study by Maloret & Scott (2014) identified how patients with ASD experience and cope with admission to an acute mental health facility.

**Results**

- Most patients with ASD receive inpatient psychiatric treatment in general psychiatry units.
- There are few specialized inpatient psychiatric units identified in US for children with ASD.
- They offer inpatient services embedded within a continuum of specialized developmental disorders services run by the institutions. They are composed of multidisciplinary teams-child psychiatrist, social worker, psychologist or board certified behavior analyst.
- These are mostly concentrated geographically in northeastern united states.
- Challenges faced by specialized units include finding adequate staff number, trained clinicians and finding appropriate follow up services after discharge.
- It has been shown that there is a decrease in readmission rate (33% vs 12%) when children with ASD are admitted to a general psychiatry unit compared to a specialized unit within the same facility.
- According to the Autism Inpatient Collection (AIC) study, there was a significant reduction in problem behaviors from admission to discharge and 2 month follow up when these children were admitted to specialized inpatient units for ASD.
- Results from the Autism care pathway (ASD-CP) in a public hospital also showed a decrease in average length of stay by 40% and a decrease in the use of crisis interventions.

**Conclusions**

- Patients with autism spectrum disorder make up a substantial portion of inpatient psychiatric patients requiring inpatient psychiatric hospitalization. Their unique characteristics pose challenges for treatment.
- These patients require a high staff to patient ratio, specialized behavioral treatments and thus the overall costs of care are higher. There are limited facilities specialized in the treatment of these individuals.
- Results from the Autism Inpatient Study (AIS) have shown that the treatment provided in specialized inpatient psychiatric facilities is highly effective for these patients compared to general psychiatric facilities.
- More inpatient facilities or treatment pathways specifically targeting children with an ASD need to be developed.

**Bibliography**


