

Report by:

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This year marked my first time attending the IMFAR. The multidisciplinary nature of IMFAR offers important opportunities for scientist practitioners to learn more about their own particular areas of research and clinical interest, as well as areas in which they have less experience. This year's conference offerings enabled me to attend presentations and posters highlighting topics as diverse as cognition, communication and language, autism symptoms and treatment, social functioning, motor systems and repetitive behaviour and clinical phenotypes. Further, IMFAR provided the opportunity to network with professionals from around the world, as well as experts from within our own country and province. In fact, some of the most interesting sessions I attended included presentations from prominent Canadian researchers such as Dr. Peter Szatmari and Dr. Wendy Roberts. Such opportunities enable students to increase their awareness of the important work being conducted in distant educational settings, as well as in nearby communities.

I was pleased to present two posters of my own. One poster shared preliminary analyses of my dissertation research, entitled "PECS: More than just a menu?". This research explores the impact of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) on the communication outcomes of 22 children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder who received PECS training in a summer camp. I also presented results from another research project I completed in a poster

entitled, "Identifying the Active Ingredients in Intensive Behavioural Intervention Programs for Children with Autism". I was pleased to learn that other clinicians and researchers from around the globe were interested in this work, many of whom shared ideas for enhancing my current research, as well as ideas for future research.

In addition to presenting my own research, I also had the opportunity to attend several poster sessions related to an area of particular clinical interest; supporting parents of children with autism spectrum disorders. Dr. Eric Butter and colleagues, working with the Research Units on Pediatric Psychopharmacology Autism Network, presented the "Development and Implementation of the RUPP Parent Training Program for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders". Following a six-month randomized trial to evaluate "risperidone only" versus "risperidone plus the parent training program", results found that a manualized parent training program can be implemented effectively, with high degrees of parental engagement. Further, medication plus parent training was found to result in the greatest reduction in serious maladaptive behaviour, versus medication alone. Meghan Swanson and colleagues conducted a randomized clinical trial examining the impact of a parent-mediated intervention on child attachment behaviours, entitled "Child Attachment Behaviors Increase in Response to a Parent-Mediated Intervention: Initial Results from a Clinical Trial in Autism". The results demonstrated that children with autism were

found to have similar attachment behaviours when compared to other populations of children and, similar to at-risk infants, can experience positive changes in attachment behaviours with the appropriate intervention. Together, these studies highlight the positive impact parents can have on their children's development when equipping with the appropriate tools.