

Report by:

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With the support of Autism Ontario, I had the opportunity to attend the 7th annual International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) in London, England. As a doctoral student in the school and clinical child psychology program at O.I.S.E. of the University of Toronto, I recognize the importance of attending interdisciplinary conferences. IMFAR exceeded my expectations and provided an invaluable opportunity to build on my current skills and knowledge and encouraged scholarly discussions with other researchers and students. This year's conference boasted the largest amount of attendees and a record number of presentations and posters displaying an array of diverse, multidisciplinary, and quality-driven research at a global level.

As I reflect on my conference experiences, I am amazed at the breadth of international material presented on autism etiology, diagnosis, and intervention that included genetic, biological, or environmental factors. The keynote addresses, educational symposia, oral presentations, and poster sessions covered an extensive array of topics which included early detection, clinical phenotypes, genetics, cognition, neuroimaging, language and communication, sensory processing, epidemiology, as well as biomedical and behavioural intervention. As a relatively new scientist/practitioner to the autism field, I enjoyed the commentary from Isabel Rapin, Ph.D., the recipient of the Autism Lifetime Achievement Award. She described how our

understanding of ASD has changed and grown over the past 60 years due to major advances in technology, multidisciplinary research and pooling of data, parent advocacy, early detection and intervention.

The underlying theme among many of the presentations highlighted the sheer complexity of ASD etiology and the need for interdisciplinary research. Keynote addresses by Francesca Happé, Ph.D. and John Constantino, Ph.D., suggested that a single etiology for autism is rare and that aspects of the autism traits can occur in isolation. Both researchers presented their related perspectives on the need for a more dimensional measurement and/or quantitative characterization of individual autism traits (e.g., social and cognitive impairments, repetitive behaviours) rather than solely relying on global ASD ratings. This approach has use across clinical, genetic, and neurobiological domains.

Part of my attendance at the conference also included the opportunity to present a poster and share some of the clinical research I have been involved in with the Autism Research Unit at the Hospital for Sick Children. The poster highlighted the early behavioural profiles and developmental trajectories of high-risk infants from the longitudinal infant sibling studies in Canada. By sharing this research, I gathered useful feedback about ways this information can be shared clinically at both the early detection and intervention

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level. I was also able to use the poster sessions to discuss research methods and relevant findings that are applicable to the conceptualization of my doctoral dissertation examining what factors contribute to important psychosocial outcomes for young people with ASD.

My attendance at IMFAR has and will continue to be an integral part of my work as a clinical researcher and doctoral student. I am grateful to Autism Ontario for their travel bursary program and recognize the value of their support in helping students committed to ASD research.