Michigan Autism Training Videos Presents:

Pharmacology and Autism

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RATIONALE FOR DRUG USE

• Reduce inappropriate responses
  - Aggression to self and others
  - Tantrums

• Drugs treat behaviors associated with irritability – NOT Autism
PREVALENCE OF MEDICATION USE: CONCERNS

- Inadequate evidence for efficacy of psychotropic medication
- Inadequate evaluations of medication over time
SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR MEDICATIONS

- Two FDA approved drugs
  - Risperidone (Risperdol)
  - Aripiprazole (Abilify)

- Common problems with studies
  - Short term
  - Weak outcome measures
  - Untoward (unintended) effects
  - Medication interactions not studied
CONCERNS FOR MEDICATION USAGE

- Lack of evidence
- Significant untoward effects
  - Some permanent
- No building behaviors
  - Drugs cannot help develop adaptive repertoires
ADDITIONAL OFF-LABEL DRUG USE

• Limit pharmacopeia (multiple medications simultaneously)

• Antipsychotic drugs
  - Haldol

• Anti-depressant drugs
  - Especially with comorbidity
“LESS IS MORE”

• Attempt to utilize medication at lowest dose
• Attempt to utilize medication for the shortest period possible
• Balance risks and benefits
ROLE OF THE BCBA

• Do what we are good at:
  - Define target behaviors
  - Measure behavior

• Ideal model
  - Collaboration with physician to implement evaluation
  - BCBA role- define and measure behaviors
to continuously monitor progress
ABERRANT BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST

• Example for child form
WHAT SHOULD A BCBA LOOK FOR?

• Side Effects
  - PDR focuses on physiological side effects
  - Also monitor for behavioral side effects
    Sleep patterns
    Attention
    Daily performance
    Social ability
    Effects of target behavior
HOW TO ADDRESS PARENTS

• Point out limited effectiveness
  - Especially for long term

• Ask what the parent wants for the child?
  - Define behavior change

• Encourage parent to talk with the physician
  - What should they expect?
  - Side effects?

• Provide readable materials for review of evidence
CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTISM

• Impaired Communication
• Impaired Social Interaction
• Restricted Behavioral Repertoire

* Ideally, medications would treat these core characteristics, but this is not the case currently.*