The inclusion of autistic needs in health provision: Using the autistic hierarchy of needs in the pursuit of mental health.

Dr Claire Evans-Williams¹ ²
Consultant Clinical Psychologist

Dr Damien J. Williams²
Academic Advisor

“The moral test of ... [society] is how ... [it] treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped [sic].”

(Autscape '18)

“the potential of individuals with ASD ... seems limited more by the failure of the systems charged with supporting them than by the challenges directly associated with their diagnosis” (p.38)

(Autscape '18)
Autism and mental health

- Mental health difficulties are common for autistic individuals
- Pose an additional challenge for autistic adults
- Add to complexity of needs
- Services?

Mental health services

- Accessible
- Available
- Appropriate

Approach to autistic needs

Current approach:
- Rigid
- Top-down
- Professional-led

What we need:
- Flexible
- Bottom-up
- Needs-driven!
Autistic needs

NOT based solely on a diagnostic label or intellect!

• May not be immediately obvious
• Complex and lifelong
• Differ across the life-span

I Exist
(The National Autistic Society, 2008)

63% of autistic adults reported that they do not have enough support to meet their needs

Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs
Autistic Hierarchy of Needs
(Evans-Williams & Williams, 2017)
Autistic Hierarchy of Needs
(Evans-Williams & Williams, 2017)
Person-centred planning (PCP)

- Requires thorough understanding of each individual's personality, abilities, difficulties, aspirations and support
- Takes time
- Must balance focus on skills/abilities/like's and challenges/dislike's
- Need to attend to the detail of their life and personal preferences.

Julia's story
(Evans-Williams, 2017)

- Worried about living alone
- Arguing a lot with my friend
- "Who am I?" - Feeling lost in my life.
- Headaches, feel sick, & need to be alone
- Being awake at night has "always been problematic"
- "Hoping for promotion" but falling behind at work
- "Feeling like I'm not living my life"
PERSONAL SAFETY
Lack of safety/communication strategies = ↑ risk of harm

RELATIONSHIPS
Challenges with social imagination = Misunderstandings with friend

SELF-IDENTITY
Changing myself to "fit in" with others = "Who am I?" Feeling lost

SHUTDOWNS
Masking/mimicking & sensory overload = Exhaustion & feeling unwell

SLEEP
Use of TV and iPad in bed ↑ arousal = Unhelpful sleeping practices

SELF-ESTEEM
Executive functioning challenges = Organising workload is hard

The Autism Academy UK (TAAUK)
• Training/coaching on the Hierarchy
• Diagnostic assessment and therapeutic intervention
• Animal-assisted therapy
• Specialist professional training
• Inpatient & community-level consultation
• Academic research

Summary
• Mental health difficulties = Additional challenge for autistic adults
• Mental health services: Availability, Accessibility, & Appropriateness
• Addressing needs of autistic people: Rigid, top-down, → Flexible, bottom-up, professional-led needs-driven
• Autistic hierarchy of needs = A human rights approach
Thank you for your time

Questions???

@DrEvansWilliams
@autismacademyuk
claire@autismac.com
damien@autismac.com