

Sidra Medicine Marks World Autism Day

Qatar Foundation healthcare organization shares recommendations for caregivers, parents and teachers

Doha, Qatar 2 April 2018: To mark World Autism Day on April 2 and World Autism Month throughout April, Sidra Medicine experts shared a series of recommendations for parents to consider in engaging children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Autism is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder, predominantly genetic in nature. Children with ASD manifest a range of symptoms associated with difficulties in language and communication and social interaction.

Sidra Medicine's approach to caring for children with ASD reflects its wider vision of providing family-centered and evidence-based patient care delivered by an exceptional cadre of faculty. The healthcare organization's clinicians shared some insights to support caregivers, teachers and professionals who work with individuals with ASD.

Individuals with ASD face a number of challenges due to difficulties associated with social communication and interaction. Many also have sensory complications and restricted interests that may limit their social engagement, as well as the learning and development of new skills. However, it is important to keep in mind that individuals with ASD have strengths and abilities that need to be nurtured.

A key suggestion that Sidra Medicine's experts made includes acknowledging and cultivating these interests, strengths, and talents. Such an approach creates rich opportunities for social, academic and vocational growth and development.

Dr. Nahed Alateeqi, Senior Attending Physician in the Department of Developmental Pediatrics at Sidra Medicine explained, "It is important to try to balance nurturing the talents of children with ASD in everyday routines and activities and not think of them as interfering with the child's progress in other areas. For example, allow your child to draw as a solitary activity if that's what interests them. Think of it as time to relax and regulate emotionally and don't view it as a way of hiding away from social interactions and engagements."

Utilizing a child's interests is also an excellent way to motivate and develop new skills. It is an opportunity to introduce children with ASD to others who have similar interests to share their experiences and passions. Sidra Medicine experts suggest that one way to do this is to encourage children to participate in after school activities or clubs such as science clubs, music and theater activities, as well as art programs.

Finally, Dr. Alateeqi suggested that it's important to incorporate interests into learning by motivating the child to stay focused on school work. "For example, you can make use of a child's interest in cars by reading a book about the topic. You can also do math problems by counting vehicles or measuring the length of different models," she said.

At Sidra Medicine, the Developmental Pediatrics and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry clinics currently provide multiple services for children and young people with ASD. This includes comprehensive diagnostic assessments and treatment recommendations. The clinics also provide evaluation services for children with comorbid emotional and psychiatric issues.

Since last year, Sidra Medicine has also been accepting ASD referrals from schools. Children referred with suspected ASD participate in a multidisciplinary assessment by a team of doctors, psychologists, therapists and nurses. This approach allows for a more accurate and immediate diagnosis, which in turn leads to earlier intervention.

And while administering the necessary medical treatment is important, Sidra Medicine also understands the impact of raising awareness about the issue and highlighting the strengths and talents of children with ASD. To celebrate World Autism Month, the team at Sidra Medicine is organizing an art exhibition highlighting works by children with ASD. The exhibition will run from April 29 to May 3 at the Sidra Medicine Outpatient Clinic and will be open to the public. Further details will be shared via social media on Twitter: @sidramedicine.

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The top five things Qatar needs to know about Sidra Medicine:

1. Sidra Medicine is a specialty children's, young people and women's healthcare organization, and forms an integral part of the dynamic education, research, and community development environment at Qatar Foundation (QF).
2. Sidra Medicine will provide comprehensive specialist healthcare services for children and young people and maternity care for the women of Qatar. Sidra Medicine includes an outpatient clinic, a main hospital and a research institution. It is also an academic medical center.
3. Sidra Medicine main hospital currently accepts inpatient admissions BY REFERRAL and APPOINTMENT ONLY. For more details, please call: 4003 3333.
4. The Emergency Department at Sidra Medicine is NOT OPEN. More services will become available including the opening of the Emergency Department during the course of 2018.
5. As a member of QF, and through strong partnerships with leading institutions in Qatar and around the world, Sidra Medicine helps to position Qatar as a leading center of excellence for healthcare globally. As a landmark project located within Education City, Sidra Medicine is emblematic of Qatar Foundation's investment in the health and well-being of Qatar's community.

Notes to editors

- Sidra Medicine's mission is to be a beacon of learning, discovery and exceptional care, ranked among the top academic medical centers in the world.
- Sidra Medicine will provide world-class healthcare services for children, young people and women in Qatar and internationally.
- Sidra Medicine includes an outpatient clinic, a main hospital and a research institution. It is also an academic medical center.
- Sidra Medicine, a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, represents the vision of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser who serves as its Chairperson.
- Sidra Medicine's values are trust, care, teamwork, transparency, innovation and efficiency
- Sidra Medicine's research program will help develop ground-breaking treatments, technologies and techniques, especially in the areas of Maternal Fetal Medicine, Genetics and Genomics and Maternal Diabetes and Metabolic Syndromes
- Once fully operational, Sidra Medicine:
 - Will become the leading children's hospital in Qatar.
 - Will be the only specialist center treating pregnant women with fetal complications.

- Will handle 275,000 outpatient appointments, 11,000 procedures, 100,000 emergency attendances and deliver over 9,000 babies.
- Will feature 140 clinic rooms, 10 operating theatres, 400 beds, 100 per cent single rooms with a private bathroom, a birthing center and emergency department.
- Will employ 2,000 nurses, 600 doctors and 800 other health care professionals, as well as administrative staff.
- Sidra Medicine outpatient services launched on 1 May 2016 and now operates 47 clinics and services for children, young people including maternity care for the women of Qatar.
- Sidra Medicine is located in Education City, Doha.
- For further information, please visit <http://www.sidra.org/>