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Care at Home and School for Children with Autism April is Autism Awareness Month

Mt. Laurel, NJ – April 2, 2013 - According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately one in 88 children are identified as having an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). While children with ASD share similar symptoms such as problems with social interaction, there are usually differences in when the symptoms start and in their severity.

“ASD is called a spectrum disorder because it affects different children in different ways,” explained BAYADA Director of Pediatric Clinical Operations Kathy Pfeiffer, BSN, RN. “Care in the home and in the school environment can be part of a comprehensive treatment plan for children with a more severe form of the disorder.”

According to Pfeiffer, parents may be unsure if their child’s behavior is something they “will grow out of,” or if it is a sign of an ASD. Symptoms of ASD usually start before the age of three. Parents should consider further evaluation if their child:

- Is unable to respond to their name by 12 months
- Does not point at objects to show interest by 14 months
- Does not play “pretend” games by 18 months
- Avoids eye contact and wants to be alone
- Has trouble understanding other people’s feelings or talking about their own feelings
- Repeats words or phrases over and over
- Gives unrelated answers to questions
- Gets upset by minor changes
- Has obsessive interests
- Flaps their hands, rocks their body, or spins in circles
- Has unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look, or feel

“Children with ASD may also experience delayed speech and language skills,” said Pfeiffer. “In fact, according to the CDC, an estimated 25 to 30 percent of children with ASD speak some words at 12 to 18 months and then lose them. Others might speak, but not until later in school.”

According to the National Institutes of Health, a health care provider experienced in diagnosing and treating ASD is usually needed to make the actual diagnosis. Because there is no biological test for ASD, the diagnosis will often be based on very specific criteria, including screening tests for autism such as the Checklist for Autism in Toddlers or the Autism Screening Questionnaire.

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In addition, a team of specialists should evaluate the child for:

- Communication, language, and speech skills
- Motor skills
- Success at school
- Cognitive abilities

While there is no cure for ASD, research shows that early intervention treatment services can greatly improve a child's development. These services can include speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and applied behavior analysis, which includes assessment, planning, consultation, family training, and individual skills training

“Although the disorder is characterized by developmental disabilities, children with ASD often suffer from a number of medical conditions, including allergies, asthma, epilepsy, digestive disorders, persistent viral infections, feeding disorders, and sleep disorders,” explained Pfeiffer. “Home health care nurses can provide care during and after a seizure, respiratory care, feeding tube care, medication administration, and assistance with verbalization and communication devices. In addition, the child may benefit from home health aides, who can assist with bathing and grooming.”

According to Pfeiffer, children with a more severe form of the disease may be eligible for one-on-one care in their school, both in the classroom and during transportation to and from school. In addition, family members can also benefit from respite services, which can provide them with a short-term break from the ongoing challenges of caring for a child with special needs.

At BAYADA, all nurses and home health aides undergo thorough background and reference checks and receive specialized training to care for the developmental and physical needs of children with ASD.

“BAYADA can provide an alternative to facility-based care and keep children where they want to be, in the comfort and safety of home surrounded by loved ones,” shared Pfeiffer.

To learn more about home health care services for children with ASD or other developmental or physical challenges, call 800-305-3000 or visit www.bayada.com.

Founded in 1975 by J. Mark Baiada, BAYADA Home Health Care provides nursing, rehabilitative, therapeutic, hospice, and assistive care services to children, adults, and seniors in the comfort of their homes. Headquartered in suburban Philadelphia, BAYADA employs more than 18,000 nurses, home health aides, therapists, medical social workers, and other home health care professionals who serve their communities in 25 states from more than 250 offices. For more information, visit www.bayada.com.