



Autism Across the Lifespan

Controversies and Critical Issues

18-20 September, 2024

Hyderabad, India



**Indo-Canadian Autism Network
International Symposium**

About I-CAN 2024



THE INDO-CANADIAN AUTISM NETWORK (I-CAN) is an international volunteer network that links Canadian expertise with Indian clinicians and researchers in autism and related disorders. I-CAN's primary goal is to provide participating centers in India and Canada with a platform for sharing and exchanging knowledge and experience.

I-CAN is hosting a three-day symposium from 18th to 20th September 2024, in Hyderabad, India.

Autism Across the Lifespan – Controversies and Critical Issues has been aptly chosen as the title of the event to represent the range of topics that will be covered, from autism assessment and intervention, transitions, and critical issues and debates that shape the lives of individuals with autism and their families..

I-CAN 2024 will include two days of clinical presentations, keynotes, invited lectures and interactive workshops with the goal to continue to build capacity through training, education and engagement with critical topics that impact the quality of life of autistic children, adolescents, adults and their families.

On day 3, for the first time, I-CAN will host a session for parents and professionals. We are pleased to have Ms Merry Barua, founder of Action for Autism and INSAR Advocate of the Year awardee (2015), as our guest speaker for this session.

The symposium will present an opportunity for active networking between clinicians, researchers, and practitioners and facilitate the sharing of resources developed in the different I-CAN sites. The I-CAN leads' meeting will focus on strategies to strengthen I-CAN and identify a path to move forward with its mission of improving the quality of life of autistic people and their families by building capacity and conducting sustainable research.

ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM ---

The Symposium will be held in two Parts:

Part 1 will be a set of 2-day training workshops. This will be open to I-CAN Leads from Canada and India and three delegates from each I-CAN India site.

Keynote address, invited speakers and workshops on

Day 1 will provide advanced tools, approaches and strategies to clinicians and researchers working in the field of autism and its related disorders in the following areas:

- Controversies Surrounding Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and How to Move Forward
- Supporting Autistic Toddlers and Their Caregivers
- Sexuality in Puberty
- Autism Diagnostic Interview Revised (ADI-R) and Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS-2) Reliability Training Exercises
- Working With Families
- Complex Case Discussions

Day 2 will introduce important and relevant topics related to autistic adolescents and Adults in the Following Areas:

- Neurodevelopmental Conditions and Disorders and the Early Symptomatic Syndromes Eliciting Neurodevelopmental Clinical Examinations (ESSENCE) Concept
- Communication Challenges
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for Siblings and Caregivers
- Transition to Adulthood
- Helping Caregivers Find Time for Themselves

Three workshops running concurrently each day, led by indian and canadian leads in specific areas:

- Each Workshop Will Accommodate up to 18 Trainees.
- 20 Canadian and Indian Leads and 36 Trainees from the I-CAN Sites

Part 2 will be a workshop for Parents, Caregivers and Professionals on Supporting Children and Young Adults with Autism.

The I-CAN india sites will have the opportunity to receive basic and advanced training in tools, strategies, and approaches on topics relevant to their work; knowledge sharing among the india sites to introduce new and advanced approaches; and continuing support and follow-up with CEPs and mentoring.

This event is hosted and sponsored by Divi's Foundation for Gifted Children (DFGC). We'd also thank the Royal College International and Community Living Toronto for their support.

The event is open to I-CAN partners in Canada and India and staff of current Indian member agencies of I-CAN. Through the generosity of DFGC, this event is provided at no cost to attendees. In addition, eligible attendees will receive an honorarium to support local travel and lodging expenses.



MEETING ORGANISING CO-CHAIR

- Dr Koyeli Sengupta
- Ms Kavita Kamat

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

- Dr Jessica Brian
- Dr Christopher Gillberg

**INVITED SPEAKERS AND
PANELISTS**

- Ms Jo Chopra McGowan
- Ms Kavita Kamat

PROGRAMME**AND ORGANISING COMMITTEE**

- Dr Vikram Dua
- Dr Koyeli Sengupta
- Ms Kavita Kamat
- Ms Nisha M Printer
- Ms Nilima Divi
- Ms Shirisha D

SYMPOSIUM SECRETARIAT

- I-CAN Hub

SPECIAL THANKS

- Ms Nilima Divi, Managing Trustee, DFGC
- Dr Kishore Mulpuri
- Dr Pramod G, Fernandez Foundation
- Ms Sirisha D, Management Executive, DFGC
- Brand and Communication Team, Fernandez Foundation
- IT Team, Fernandez Foundation

REGISTRATION AND HONORARIUMS

- Registration for the 2-day educational event (plenaries and workshop) is free of cost to I-CAN member agencies.
- With the generosity of the DFGC, honorarium support is provided for eligible attendees to support individual local expenses.



LOCATION AND HOTEL

- I-CAN 2024 will be held at Hotel Avasa, Hyderabad, India.
- <https://goo.gl/maps/zrT63y8xE6PnkJ4b8>

INTENSIVE TRAINING WORKSHOPS

- I-CAN 2024 will provide six concurrent training workshops, led by one of our Indian and Canadian faculty. Training workshops will emphasise practical applications that can be readily implemented with clinical and research activities of the agency.
- I-CAN leads will identify team members who will not only utilise, but also share the learnings with their teams and support adoption of practices..

POST-SYMPOSIUM NETWORK SITE VISITS

I-CAN faculty will participate in individual visits and consultations at network sites before and after the Hyderabad symposium:

- Fernandez Child Development Center, Hyderabad
- Center for Child Development and Disabilities, Bangalore
- AIIMS, New Delhi
- AFA, New Delhi
- Embrace, New Delhi

March 18th, Wednesday

Morning Session

- **9:00 AM**

Inauguration of I-CAN Symposium 2024

- **9:15 AM**

Welcome Address | Dr Vikram Dua

- **9:30 AM**

Overview of Symposium proceedings | Dr Koyeli Sengupta

- **9:40 AM**

Keynote Address | Dr Jessica Brian, Holland Bloorview, Canada

Supporting Autistic Toddlers and their Caregivers: Research Overview and Reflections on Neurodiversity-Affirming Care in the Early Years

This talk will provide an overview of the current state of evidence regarding interventions and supports for autistic toddlers and their families, with a focus on caregiver-mediated programs. The talk will present the current state of research evidence, we will talk about why research rigour matters, and discuss the facilitators and barriers to implementation of evidence-based programmes in the real world. We will touch on issues related to neurodiversity-affirming care and rights-based care, and how these can be conceptualised in the toddler years..

- **10:30 AM**

Invited Lecture | Ms Kavita Kamat, poAbilities, Canada

Controversies Surrounding ABA and How to Move Forward

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is a scientific approach widely used for individuals with Autism Spectrum disorder (ASD) to address challenging behaviours and teach necessary functional skills. Despite its effectiveness, it has been a subject of significant controversy in recent years. As an ABA practitioner myself, this has been an area of considerable interest. In this presentation, I will explore what fuels the controversies, address misconceptions that plague ABA, and outline what ABA practitioners can do better to tap into the transformative potential of the science to improve the quality of life of individuals we all support.

- **11:00 AM**

Tea Break

- **11:30 AM**

Dr Merina Shrestha, Autism Nepal

Complex Case Presentation

In this session, a neurodevelopmentally complex youth will be presented and reviewed. The case presentation will be followed by a facilitated group discussion. The focus will be on diagnostic clarification guiding medication treatment, with emphasis on evidence-based approaches, and highlighting some of the common misassumptions and pitfalls of psychopharmacology.

- **1:00 PM**

Lunch Break

September 18th, Wednesday

Afternoon Session

- **02:00 PM – 5:00 PM**

Concurrent Workshops

Workshop 1 | Dr Nandita DeSouza - SETHU

Sexuality in Puberty

Sexuality is a fundamental aspect of human growth and development. Puberty can be a very stressful time for autistic teenagers and their families due to difficulties in communication, impaired social understanding, cognitive abilities, and sensory issues.

The Sexuality in Puberty workshop is an interactive 3-hour session for professionals who work with autistic children and their families. Through group discussions of case scenarios, practical strategies and skills suitable to the Indian context will be imparted.

The workshop's objective is to enable professionals to return to their place of work with a host of simple, practical strategies that can be easily implemented to support adolescents through puberty and beyond.

Participants will learn

- How to develop sexuality education plans, teach families and adolescents to understand and care for themselves, learn about their changing bodies, build friendships, and express their sexuality in a socially acceptable way.
- Reading material and links to open-source resources will also be shared.

Workshop 2 | Dr Koyeli Sengupta, Disha Zaveri, Sanchita Mahadik and Tasneem Jawadwala, Ummeed, Mumbai

Working with Families-Principles and Application

Families are an integral part of the work we all do with children with disabilities and developmental conditions like autism. However, at different points, many of us might feel that including caregivers as partners and collaborators in the intervention journey sometimes feels “easier said than done.”

The workshop will include a brief didactic followed by interactive group activities around commonly encountered clinical practice scenarios.

In this workshop, members from the Ummeed Autism Intervention team will engage participants in:

1. Exploring the core principles of family-centred care and how they translate into practice within our contexts.
2. Applying tenets of FCC in real-life cases.

For this exercise, participants are encouraged to send in case studies about “difficult/challenging families” that they would like to discuss.

Workshop 3 | Dr Vikram Dua

ADI -R and ADOS – 2

Diagnostic assessment of older youth and young adults can be a confounding process for clinicians. The applicability and adaptability of gold-standard diagnostic tools can seem uncertain. This workshop is intended for experienced diagnosticians familiar with the ADI-R and the ADOS-2. In the session, participants will observe a live clinical assessment, followed by a scoring exercise and diagnostic formulation. The discussion will explore issues related to social validity, lifespan developmental trajectories, instrument fidelity, and differential diagnosis.

- **05:00 PM**

Tea Break

- **05:15 PM**

Feedback Session | Nisha Printer

September 19th, Thursday

Morning Session

- **08:45 AM**

Overview of Symposium Proceedings | Ms Kavita Kamat

- **09:00 AM - 12:00 Noon**

Concurrent Workshops

Workshop 1 | Shoba S. Meera PhD, Associate Professor, PI: LiL', NIMHANS, Co-facilitators: Divya Swaminathan and Shree Volme, LiL', NIMHANS, Bangalore & Ashish Kumar, Latika, Dehradun

Communication Challenges – A Whole Team Approach

Communication is a fundamental right for everyone, and ensuring effective communication is a shared responsibility. While speech-language pathologists play a pivotal role, the entire team must support and promote communication inclusively. Thus, this session will focus on communication challenges in autistic individuals across their lifespans and the importance of a team approach to address these concerns across various settings (e.g., school settings and hospital-based intervention centres). The session will begin with an overview by the facilitator, followed by a discussion of case vignettes and an interactive treasure hunt, and will conclude with a multi-disciplinary panel discussion. Key learning outcomes of the workshop include:

1. Understand communication challenges in autistic individuals across the lifespan.
2. Build collaborative goals to support communication in autistic individuals.
3. Identify opportunities and apply key concepts from the workshop to support communication in your professional interactions with autistic individuals.

Workshop 2 | **Ms Tina Gandhi**, Surrey Place, Toronto and **Dr Kritika Rajaraman**, CCDD, Bengaluru

ACT for Caregivers and Siblings

The focus of the presentation is a discussion of implementing the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) groups for caregivers and siblings of children with autism. This talk will outline the key outcomes and value of utilising the ACT model with caregiver and sibling groups at both CCDD and Surrey Place. CCDD will provide their three-year journey on conducting the Online ACT Parents group (Maitri), barriers that had been overcome in the Indian setting, and also provide an overview of the rationale and the topics from the Sibling ACT group (Mitr) pilot. Exercises from the Sibling ACT group will also be shared.

In this workshop, participants will engage in an interactive discussion of the concepts, practical examples, and exercises of the ACT model, including strategies and videos for adapting ACT to an Indian setting.

Workshop 3 | **Dr Nidhi Singhal**, AFA New Delhi, **Ms Sarah O Donoghue** and **Mr Joseph Passaretti**, CLTO, Toronto.

Preparing for Adulthood

Adulthood brings with it expectations, responsibilities, and rights in the realms of social relationships, health, work and employment, relationships, and marriage. Adults are supposed to earn their livelihood, marry, procreate, and become responsible, contributing members of their community. Often denied the 'normal' adult roles, autistic persons are instead viewed as a 'burden' or 'permanent children' who are to be in the care and 'protection' of their families or special facilities. However, we change this by preparing for the transition to adulthood during childhood.

Going beyond academics, this workshop will focus on the transition planning process and pivotal life skills such as emotional regulation, identifying priorities, budgeting, understanding boundaries and so on that can foster independence at home and work settings. Through real-life examples, group activities, and discussions, this workshop will focus on neurodiversity-affirming, context-based strategies that may be implemented with speaking and non-speaking autistic persons across ages and abilities as well as their family members

- **12:15 PM**

Lunch Break

March 19th, Thursday

Afternoon Session

- **01:15 PM**

Complex Case Presentation | Dr Gautam Kamila, AIIMS

In this session, a neurodevelopmentally complex youth will be presented and reviewed. The case presentation will be followed by a facilitated group discussion. The focus will be on diagnostic clarification guiding medication treatment, with emphasis on evidence-based approaches, and highlighting some of the common misassumptions and pitfalls of psychopharmacology.

- **02:40 PM**

Invited Lecture | Ms Jo Mc-Gowan Chopra, LRF, Dehradun

In this Invited lecture titled "Five Minutes Peace: Helping Caregivers Find Time for Themselves," Jo Chopra will explore how caregivers can get a bit of respite and why it is crucial that they do so.

The "F Words" are useful beyond simply planning for a disabled child. To varying degrees, all six concepts are also useful for caregivers thinking about their own lives.

Numerous studies on caregivers' personal lives make it clear that friendship and fun (my favourites among the F words) are missing from most caregivers' lives. Social isolation, exhaustion and sadness often overwhelm families, putting their mental health at risk and making it difficult, if not impossible, to care for their children.

Respite is not a luxury but a genuine human need.

- **03:30 PM**

Tea Break

- **03:45 PM**

- **Keynote Address | Dr Christopher Gillberg**

- **Neurodevelopmental Conditions and Disorders and the ESSENCE Concept**

It has long been assumed that ICD/DSM-diagnostic categories of neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) exist in isolation, and that so-called comorbidities are only encountered in exceptional cases. Over the past 25 years, we – and now several other groups as well – have been able to demonstrate that in severe cases of autism, with functional impairment in the preschool years, comorbidity occurs in 100%. Language disorder (LD), ADHD, tics, DCD, and intellectual disability (ID) are perhaps the most prevalent of these overlapping/comorbid conditions. Similarly, severe ADHD is almost universally comorbid with other conditions, including LD, tics, DCD, ID, and autism/severe autistic features.

Fifteen years ago, I launched the concept of Early Symptomatic Syndromes Eliciting Neurodevelopmental Clinical Examinations/ESSENCE to account for the need to always consider using a holistic perspective when evaluating children and young people for any kind of possible NDD, and to emphasise that co-existence of conditions is the rule rather than the exception. We are all neurodiverse, but some of us meet the criteria for two or more NDDs. Then, we usually need holistic assessments and diagnosis (from the Greek "via gnosis", meaning through knowledge).

- **04:45 PM**

- **Feedback Session | Nisha M Printer**

- **05:00 PM**

- **Wrap up | Dr Vikram Dua & Ms Nisha Printer**

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH AUTISM

For Parents/Caregivers and Professionals

18-20 September, 2024

Topics:

1. Autism and Mental Health

Speaker:

Dr Vikram Dua - Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist in Vancouver, Canada, Expert in Complex individuals in Autism and Developmental Delay

2. Using Visual Supports

Speaker:

Ms Merry Barua - Founder of Action for Autism, New Delhi and INSAR Advocate of the Year awardee (2015)

Use of Visual Supports

Autism is not defined by behaviours but rather by a unique cognitive and sensory processing system. Individuals on the autism spectrum experience the world differently, with distinct neurological patterns that shape how they perceive information, process stimuli, and interact with their environment. A marker of this difference is that many autistic individuals are visual learners who are best able to retain and process information that is presented visually. The use of visuals accommodates autistic differences, and respects individual strengths and challenges, rather than attempting to suppress, fix or normalise autistic behaviours. The workshop will discuss the different ways that visuals can contribute to autistic wellbeing.

MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGING TRUSTEE

Shaping the Future of Autism and Birth Defects Care Through Collaborative Efforts

Divi's Foundation for Gifted Children (DFGC), established in 2015, is dedicated to raising awareness and enhancing the quality of assessments and care in the field of autism across India. With a vision for holistic development and inclusiveness, DFGC aims to ensure that every child with birth defects has access to world-class, evidence-based care and therapies. Our mission is to provide families with comprehensive support on par with global standards.

Key Initiatives of DFGC

- **UNICEF Partnership: ASM Project for Birth Defects and Developmental Disorders**

In collaboration with UNICEF, DFGC spearheads efforts to raise awareness and strengthen systems for managing birth defects and developmental disorders. Together, we engage key stakeholders and support state health departments in enhancing newborn screening and prevention programs. This initiative, part of the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), focuses on conditions such as developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH) and autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

- **HIPpy Research Programme**

DFGC supports the HIPpy Research Programme, a global leader in hip dysplasia research, and collaborates with the International Hip Dysplasia Registry (IHDR) to advance treatment protocols for DDH. DDH, a common paediatric condition, affects approximately 0–75 out of every 1,000 live births in India. Through this partnership, DFGC aims to set new standards of care for children with DDH worldwide.

- **I-CAN: Indo-Canadian Autism Network**

DFGC was instrumental in establishing the Indo-Canadian Autism Network (I-CAN), a joint initiative launched in July 2019 in Hyderabad. This collaborative effort brings together autism experts from India and Canada to share research, best practices, and services for ASD. I-CAN facilitates both virtual and in-person training, ensuring continuous learning and hands-on support for ASD professionals in India.

- **FCDC: Centre of Excellence for Autism Care**

In partnership with Fernandez Hospital, DFGC has set up a Centre of Excellence for Autism Care in Hyderabad. This facility offers a wide range of integrated therapies, including Occupational Therapy, Behavioural Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Remedial Therapy, Physiotherapy, Yoga for special needs, and Art Therapy.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our co-sponsors, the Royal College International and Community Living Toronto, for their unwavering support in advancing autism care in India. We also deeply appreciate the dedication of our faculty and the meticulous planning that went into organizing this symposium.

Warm regards,

Ms Nilima Divi

Managing Trustee,
Divi's Foundation for Gifted Children



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