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Serving the Underserved: Language Intervention to Children with Disorders of the Autism Spectrum in Brazil

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Language disorders are considered part of the symptoms of the autism spectrum disorders (ASD) since the first descriptions by Kanner. Providing language therapy services to children with ASD is a challenge in countries such as Brazil, where besides geographic and social-cultural diversity there is a lack of enough professionals with adequate training. Therefore university-related services have a fundamental role in filling this gap.

This presentation will describe the various initiatives by such a service is São Paulo, one of the world's largest metropolitan areas. This specialized service provides language assessment, diagnosis and weekly therapy to children with ASD since 1986. During this period ASD's complexity became clear and demanded the inclusion of other activities such as: multiprofessional collaboration; interdisciplinary research; out-reaching and mentoring of teachers with children and adolescents with ASD in their classes; systematic meetings with parents; use of tele-health resources to increase the number of services provided to this population; editing and distribution of brochures to improve the awareness about ASD and development of assessment tools adapted to the Brazilian reality.

These initiatives were conducted within the context of scientific research, therefore providing elements to evidence-based-practice. Many of the researches were associated to 37 Master and Doctorate projects and were published in scientific journals (115 papers). Also, during this period many professionals had their specialized training and are now teaching in other universities.

Today 80 children and adolescents attend to weekly language therapy sessions and 12 undergraduate, 8 graduate students, 3 post-doctorate and 2 researches comprise the team.