

in everyday life. For instance, themes in the series include change of home, death of a parent, talking about abuse, appropriate social contact, going to the doctors or the hospital and going to court. We have found these books very helpful in clinical practice with a range of ages (available from the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Book Sales Department, tel: 020 7285 2351 ext. 146). Media based self-help has been evaluated in the training of parents as therapists. However, there is inconclusive evidence of the impact of this without proper supervision and professional involvement (Kashima et al, 1988).

### Autism and other developmental disorders

*I am Special*, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers (Vermeulan, 2000), introduces children and adolescents with autistic spectrum disorders to their condition. It contains information about autism and the specific problems that people with the condition face in their day-to-day life. It explains why a child or young person with autism is different and how his/her relationships with others can be affected as a result. The book is divided into two parts. The first part introduces a child to the terms autism and Asperger's syndrome and explains how to use the worksheets. The second is designed to help the child develop a book about him-/herself. This may also increase the child's engagement by enrolling the parent or teacher or other professional to work on the exercises with the child. It uses pictorial and written language to assist the child, who may have communication difficulties. The book is appropriate for children over 10 years of age. The same publishers also offer books written by a person with a learning disability about his or her own life.

Another very important source of information for parents is the National Autistic Society (NAS) ([http://www.oneworld.org/autism\\_UK](http://www.oneworld.org/autism_UK)). The NAS has published both written and audiovisual material to help children with

autism to receive better care and improve their quality of life. The publications include leaflets with the main signs and symptoms of autism and Asperger's syndrome, advice for educational and occupational opportunities, lists of local parents' groups and available interventions. Another NAS publication, *It can get Better* (Dickinson & Hannah, 1998) deals with common behaviour problems in young children with autism. It is addressed at parents and carers and offers advice on how to manage problems such as repetitive and obsessional behaviours, self-injury, destructiveness, sleep disturbance, temper tantrums and many more. Each chapter is illustrated, preceded by a brief introduction giving basic information on the problem to be discussed and followed by guidelines, a brief question and answer section and summary. It is inexpensive (Cost £5.00) and has very good advice.

### Specific syndromes

Down's syndrome is the most common cause of learning disability. The Down's Syndrome Association (UK) (<http://www.dsa-UK.com>) offers advice and support to parents in the form of booklets, local parent groups, newsletters and other specially organised events. Their booklet, which can be read online, gives parents important information about how to cope with the birth of a baby with Down's syndrome. It explains the syndrome and includes common physical problems and advice about how to play and interact with the child so that specific conditions can be remedied at an early stage (e.g. how to exercise the facial muscles so that they can become less hypotonic and support the tongue, how to stimulate the child and precipitate the next developmental phase). The Fragile X Society is another charity that provides support and information to parents and families of children with fragile X syndrome. The society produces a biannual newsletter that contains both facts and personal opinions by the parents themselves. The International Prader-Willi

Association offers similar advice and guidance to parents through meetings, support groups and factsheets (<http://www.ipwso.org>). 'Contact a Family' illustrated directory and website (<http://www.cafamily.org.uk>) are good sources of information about syndromes and family support groups. The organisation puts a lot of emphasis on families contacting and linking with others who have the same experiences.

### Conclusion

Self-help and information manuals are increasingly used to promote consumer awareness and empower individuals. We found many articles designed for parents, carers and teachers, but there were few written directly for the child or adolescent with a learning disability.

We have concentrated on sources specifically focusing on the child with a learning disability and the family. We would like to stress that such children have the same needs as all children and therefore general information may also be of help.

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## forthcoming events

BBR Beynon, Bishop, Ross Medical Education Ltd are the organisers of the following MRCPsych courses: **Critical Appraisal**, a 4-hour course taking place on 18 January 2002; **Part I and II Written Courses**, which take place on 19–20 January 2002; and **Part II Clinical**, which will be held on 18–19 May 2002. For further details please contact

BBR, 82 The Maltings, Roydon Road, Stanstead Abbots, Hertfordshire SG12 8HG (tel/fax: 01920 872407; e-mail: [admin@bbrrmedicaleducation.net](mailto:admin@bbrrmedicaleducation.net)).

The Perinatal Psychiatry Special Interest Group would like to announce a conference on **Perinatal Mental Illness** –

**Implementing Best Practice**, to be held in Manchester on 15 February 2002. The conference will review the recently published *Confidential Enquiry into Maternal Deaths* and how to apply its recommendations, discuss the Department of Health strategy for women's mental health and review management of the pregnant substance misuser. For

further information please contact Dr A. Wieck (tel: 0161 291 6930; e-mail: [awieck@Globalnet.co.uk](mailto:awieck@Globalnet.co.uk)), Dr M. R. Oates (tel: 0115 970 9916; e-mail: [Sue.Tilbury@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Sue.Tilbury@nottingham.ac.uk)) or Dr R. Cantwell (tel: 0141 211 3927; e-mail: [r.cantwell@clinmed.gla.ac.uk](mailto:r.cantwell@clinmed.gla.ac.uk)).

The Transcultural Special Interest Group meeting, titled **From Policy to Practice: Culturally Capable Mental Health Care**, will take place on 7 March 2002. Registration fees are £50 for members and £25 for non-members and the unwaged. For further information

please contact Dr Kam Bhui, Secretary of the Transcultural Special Interest Group, Health and Social Care for Single Homeless People, 1 St Mark Street (off Alie Street), London E1 8DJ (tel: 020 7702 9202; fax: 020 7481 8268).

**The Tenth Manchester Course in Liaison Psychiatry** will take place on 10–14 June 2002. This is an intensive week-long course in liaison psychiatry. It is most suitable for newly appointed consultants, specialist registrars and registrars. Emphasis is placed upon small group teaching and workshops. Clinical

issues covered include somatisation, psychological reactions to physical illness and medico-legal aspects of liaison psychiatry. Managerial and administrative issues are also covered, as are research and audit. Application forms and further details are available from Mrs Una Dean, Secretary to Professor E. Guthrie, University Department of Psychiatry, Rawnsley Building, Manchester Royal Infirmary, Manchester M13 9WL (tel: 0161 276 5383; fax: 0161 273 2135; e-mail: [Una.Dean@man.ac.uk](mailto:Una.Dean@man.ac.uk)).