

# CLAHRC BITE

CLAHRC CP BITE 7

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A bite-sized summary of a piece of CLAHRC research



**The Red Flags tools could help frontline professionals decide whether to refer a person for specialist assessment.**



## What?

The Red Flags are brief checklists of screening instruments for Autism Spectrum Condition. There is one for each of four age groups: toddlers, children, adolescents and adults.

## Who?

The checklists provide a quick and accurate tool for busy GPs to determine if a particular patient needs referral to a specialist centre for a full diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Condition.

## Why?

Diagnosis can be a lengthy process and the benefit to patients is to speed up the time it normally takes to access a diagnosis.

Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) can be a lengthy process. Diagnosis is often delayed because ASC can be difficult to detect in very young children; in later life ASC can be masked by other behaviours or symptoms. Expertise in recognising ASC in primary care is also inconsistent, therefore many individuals go undetected. But without a diagnosis, the needs of people with ASC cannot be met, nor appropriate support offered.

This CLAHRC research study led by Professor Simon Baron-Cohen and Dr Carrie Allison addresses the need for a tool to help primary care professionals make decisions about referral to specialist services for a full diagnostic assessment for ASC.<sup>1</sup>

The Red Flag tools were developed as short versions of 4 existing screening instruments [the Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ) (adult, adolescent, and child versions) and the Quantitative Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (Q-CHAT)].

The study has produced much needed screening measures for frontline clinicians, and NICE have included a recommendation for the use of the short AQ-10 in their guidelines for the assessment of ASC in adults.<sup>2</sup>

Adults, toddlers, children and adolescents with possible ASC will have a faster route to assessment, and consequently will be able to obtain the support they require.

## An explanation of CLAHRC CP and its role

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC CP) is a partnership between the University of Cambridge, NHS organisations in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and Cambridgeshire County Council.

Funded by the National Institute for Health Research, our mission is to undertake high quality applied research to improve health and social care across the East of England.

This is a bite-sized summary of a piece of CLAHRC CP research. It is part of a series designed to make our research findings available to clinicians, commissioners and policy-makers.

CLAHRC CP research into enabling early identification of Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) across the lifespan led by Professor Simon Baron-Cohen, is now part of the CLAHRC East of England Enduring Disability and Disadvantage research theme.

<http://www.clahrc-eeo.nihr.ac.uk/research/research-themes/enduring-disability-and-disadvantage/>

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## References

- 1) Allison C, Auyeung B, Baron-Cohen S (2012) Towards brief 'red flags' for autism screening: the short Autism Spectrum Quotient and the short Quantitative Checklist for Autism in toddlers in 1000 cases and 3000 controls. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 51: 202–12.
  - 2) Autism: recognition, referral, diagnosis and management of adults on the autism spectrum. NICE clinical guidelines CG142. National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence. June 2012
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The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health.

Requests for further information on this research should be sent to [clahrcoffice@cpft.nhs.uk](mailto:clahrcoffice@cpft.nhs.uk)