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FACULTY OF MEDICINE & HEALTH SCIENCES

ATRIA

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MEDICAL FMHS

Little Lives Big Care

Physical & Infectious Illness

Learning & Development Conditions

Parenting & Everyday Care

Community & Support

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FACULTY PROFILE

UNIMAS
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
FACULTY OF MEDICINE & HEALTH SCIENCES

Vision

A Global Leader in Medicine and Health Sciences Education.

Mission

To enhance the health and well-being of the global community through the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, and strategic collaboration.

FOREWORD

Dear readers,

It is a great pleasure to see the fourth issue of ATRIA. Each edition of ATRIA has sought to highlight topics that matter deeply to our community, and this issue is no exception. In this edition, we turn our attention to those who represent our future our children.

The theme, *"Little Lives, Big Care"*, reminds us that the health and well-being of children require more than medical treatment alone. It calls for a collective commitment from families, healthcare professionals, educators, and communities to ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive.

Within these pages, readers will find a diverse collection of articles covering childhood illnesses, learning and developmental issues, parenting and caregiving, as well as the importance of early screening and timely intervention. Together, these topics highlight the many dimensions of child health and the vital role that prevention, awareness, and compassionate care play in shaping healthier futures.

At the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, we remain committed to advancing health through education, research, and community engagement. By fostering greater understanding of children's health needs, we hope to contribute towards a society where every child receives the care and support they deserve.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the editorial team and all contributors for their dedication in producing this issue of ATRIA. I hope this edition informs, inspires, and reminds us of the profound responsibility we share in caring for the youngest members of our society. For in every child we nurture today lies the promise of a healthier and brighter tomorrow.

Happy reading.

Prof. Dr. Asri bin Said
Dean

Dear Readers,

This issue brings **Little Lives, Big Care** into focus, reminding us how thoughtful care can make a lasting difference in a child's life. Caring for children is not merely about treating illness; it is about nurturing growth, protecting potential, and shaping healthier futures.

There is a well-known saying, ***"It takes a whole village to raise a child."*** In medicine, that village extends far beyond the clinic walls. It includes families, communities, educators, nurses, doctors, allied health professionals, policymakers, and advocates; each playing a vital role in supporting a child's wellbeing. When this village stands united, care becomes comprehensive, compassionate, and sustainable.

This issue not only explores clinical insights and innovations, but also highlights parent sharing; powerful narratives that remind us of lived experiences, resilience, and the value of partnership in care.

As you read through this issue, we hope it gently reminds you that every role matters, and that your care, compassion, and commitment can make a meaningful difference in a child's life.

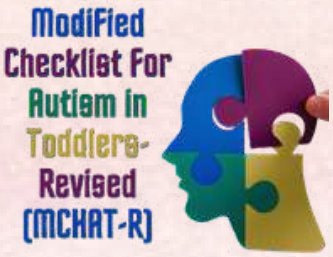
Together, let us continue offering big care to the little lives who trust us most.

Amelia Mohamad
Chief Editor

Spotting Autism Early: The Crucial Role of Parents in Early Detection

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Liu Yu Chun
Family Medicine Specialist

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), commonly referred to as autism, is increasingly diagnosed in Malaysia (Shair et al., 2024). It is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by impairments in social interaction, communication, and behaviour. Early diagnosis and timely intervention are crucial for improving developmental outcomes in affected children (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2016).



Parents play a central role in the early detection of ASD (Clintberg et al., 2026), as they are best positioned to observe their child's development and behaviour over time. Parental concerns have been shown to be valid predictors of autism (Ozonoff et al., 2009).

Several screening tools, such as the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT) and the Social Communication Questionnaire (SCQ), are available for ASD screening. In Malaysian government health clinics, autism screening is conducted during routine child health visits at 18 and 24 months of age using the M-CHAT, a well-validated screening tool (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2016). The M-CHAT is a 23-item parent-completed questionnaire that relies on caregivers' observations of their child's behaviour and development. As such, the effectiveness of screening depends heavily on accurate and honest parental reporting. Parents who have difficulty understanding the M-CHAT items should seek clarification from healthcare staff.

Children who fail the M-CHAT are referred for further clinical assessment. However, failing the M-CHAT does not confirm a diagnosis of ASD, as its symptoms may overlap with other disorders. A definitive diagnosis can only be made by trained health professionals following a comprehensive assessment, including detailed history, behavioural observation, and formal psychometric evaluation.

Parents who have concerns about their child being autistic before scheduled screening should seek early assessment by a doctor. Similarly, parents who continue to have concerns even after their child passes the M-CHAT could still seek doctor's assessment. Early referral is essential, as the average interval between initial parental concerns and formal ASD diagnosis has been reported to be approximately 26 months (Snijder et al., 2022).

In conclusion, early detection of ASD depends largely on parental awareness, vigilance, and proactive engagement with healthcare services.

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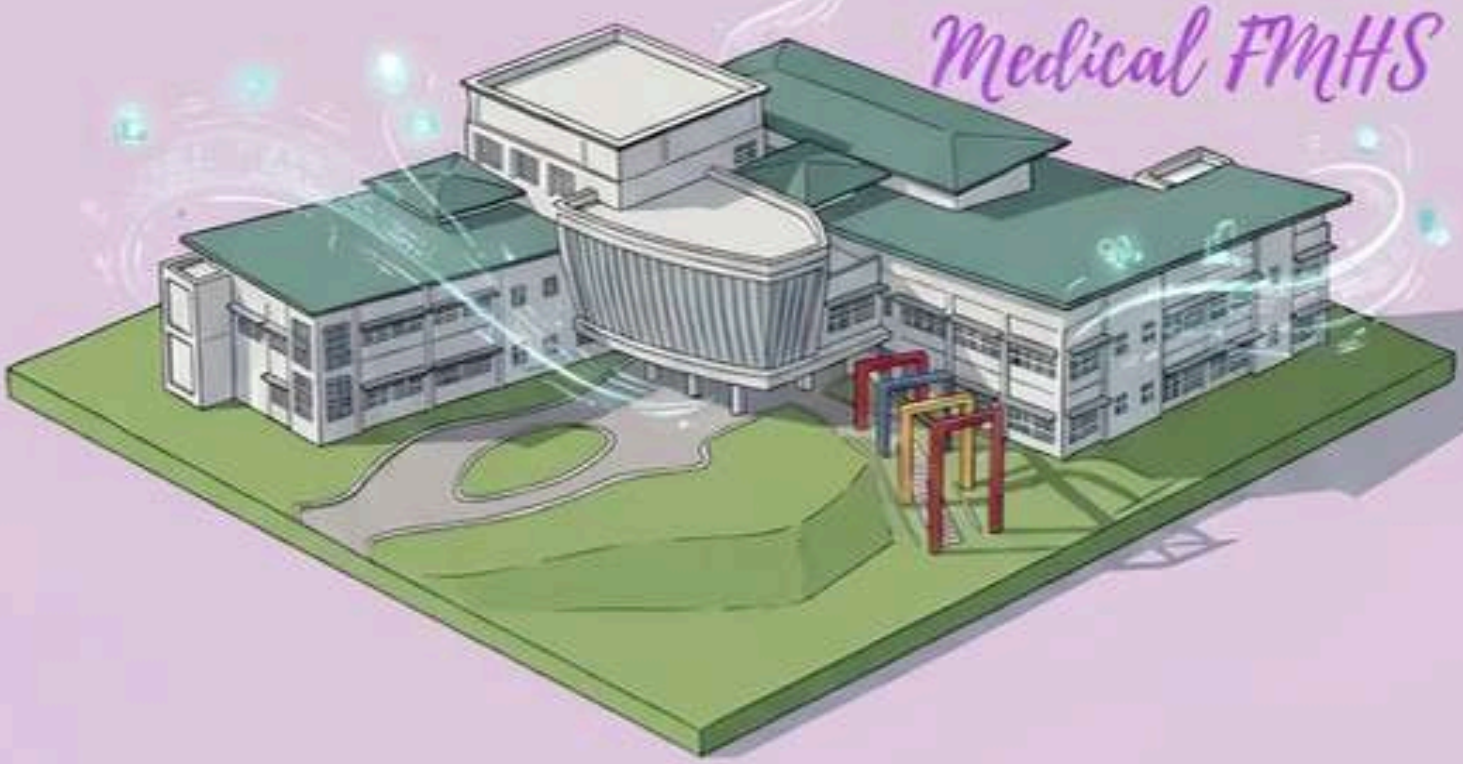
Medical FMHS



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