

# Diagnosing and Treating Autism

This year, 2005, the Ministry of Social Affairs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia issued *Diagnosing and Treating Autism*, a book by Dr. Tal'at bin Hamza al-Wazna, the General Director of Medical Services and Consultant for Diseases of the Brain and Nerve Rehabilitation. The 111-page book has a list of some of the international scientific societies for autism and a bibliography in Arabic and English at the end. The book is divided into three parts.

First, there is an introductory statement by the Minister of Social Affairs in Saudi Arabia, Dr. Ali bin Ibrahim an-Namla, acquainting the reader with the content of the book, followed by an introduction by the author saying that his book clarifies what the Arabic societies suffer due to the lack of identifying autism and specifying the specialists to treat it, giving a résumé of its contents:

The first chapter is an introduction in which the author mentions the reasons for the difficulty in diagnosing autism. He then gives an historical aperçu of the meaning of autism, and enumerates the reasons for its spread. Following this he describes the disorders of the shadow of autism calling them "The comprehensive disorders of growth."

He describes Asperger's syndrome, which is not detected before four or six years of age, and which is sometimes accompanied by the child being slightly mentally retarded. He mentions the differences between it and autism. He then goes on to describe Wright's Syndrome and how to diagnose it, it being a nervous disease found only in females, and describes the differences between it and autism, and describes the stages through which the girl afflicted with it passes. He then describes the infantile regression and the undetermined generalized develop-

mental disturbance which is called uncharacteristic autism and is the most diagnosed among the general developmental disorders. After this he goes on to show the behavioral problems that draw the attention of the autistic's parents and pertain to his behavior, such as nervousness, and social problems, such as the child's solitary personality. The author also gives an historical aperçu of the criteria for diagnosing autism which clearly shows the difference between one disorder and another. The diagnosis criteria developed by Lorna Wing and Judith Gold are those most commonly used and accepted worldwide at present. As a result of their studies and experiments these two researchers found there were three basic characteristics of autism that appear combined: inadequacy in social interaction, inadequacy in language and speech, inadequacy in imagination. The author explains the criteria for diagnosing autism that are used at present. Perhaps the most influential criteria are those mentioned in the American Psychiatrists Association's catalogue of diagnosis and statistics. The author points out the psychological measurement tools that help diagnose autism at various stages of life. He also describes the multiple specializations standardization which is the ideal standardization in which a number of specialists should participate and which saves a lot of effort, time and money and lessens the possibility of wrong diagnosis, the final diagnosis being that of the psychiatrist. After that the author describes the programs for health rehabilitation and which only aim at lessening the symptoms and behaviors and making up for the absence of the necessary skills for everyday life. He describes the basis for treating and changing the autistic's behavior such as his aggressiveness or his withdrawal, and epilepsy which requires medication, and over activity. The author also mentions the medicines used in the treatment of autism and the advantage of each. After this he describes the educational programs for the autistic which have obtained great progress in training and developing the autistic child's skills and changing his behavior.

In the second chapter entitled "The Centers for Autism" the author describes the building and architectural requirements for these centers. He describes the administrative structure for those working in them, the administrative jobs that are suggested, as well as the technical and health jobs and specializations. He also mentions the procedures and regulations to be accepted in the center for autism, and describes the cases of autism that benefit from the services of the center.

The third and last chapter consists of questions and answers concerning autism, what accompanies it, how widespread it is, the characteristics of an autistic child, and everything pertaining to autism and those that suffer from it.