Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder: What is it and why does it matter?

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Chair: Dr Anita Wong

Abstract
Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder (SCD) is a new diagnosis that requires affected children to demonstrate deficits in both social conversation and language use in context, for example to understand ambiguous phrases such as ‘she’s a cold person’. Exclusion criteria include poor vocabulary and grammar, and stereotyped interests and behaviours that characterise children with autism spectrum disorder. Implementing the new diagnosis is currently challenged by a lack of well-validated and reliable assessment measures, and observed continuities between SPCD and other neurodevelopmental disorders. In addition, there is limited evidence that the criteria ‘hang together’ or that pragmatic deficits in the absence of other development concerns yields everyday functional impairments. In this talk I will outline evidence that challenges the current criteria and conclude that SPCD is probably best conceptualized as a dimensional symptom profile. In addition, social communication and aspects of pragmatic language may be dissociated, with the latter heavily influenced by structural language attainments. Finally, there is a dearth of reliable and culturally valid assessment measures with which to make a differential diagnosis, and few rigorously tested intervention programmes. The implications for research and clinical practice will be outlined.

About the speaker
Courtenay Norbury holds a Chair (Professor) of Developmental Disorders of Language and Communication in Psychology and Language Sciences, University College London. She is the Director of the Literacy, Language and Communication (LiLaC) Lab and is a qualified speech-language therapist. She is currently one of the joint editors of the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry. Professor Norbury’s research focuses on developmental language impairments in a range of neurodevelopmental disorders including autism spectrum disorders and reading disorders. She is currently leading a population study of risk for specific language impairment at school entry, with a particular focus on identifying common co-morbidities in a population cohort. She is also interested in language profiles that cross diagnostic boundaries and has published extensively on social communication disorders and their relations with autism and specific language impairment.