Autism

REFRESHER

RECOGNIZE IT

- A neurodevelopmental disorder affecting communication, social interaction, and behavior
- A spectrum: ranges mild to severe and presents differently in each individual
- Characteristics: social interaction difficulties and communication challenges, verbal and non-verbal
- Repetitive behaviors and sensory sensitivities

ASSESS

- Expect sensory overload from lights, sirens, and crowds
- Communication barriers: delayed responses, echolalia, non-verbal cues
- Meltdowns and shutdowns are involuntary reactions to overstimulation or stress
- Patients may resist physical contact, even in emergencies
- Work through caregivers: ask triggers, calming techniques, communication preferences, and history

ACT — FIRST MOVES

1. Use simple, clear, direct language; avoid idioms; allow extra processing time
2. Use calm, repetitive verbal reassurance; provide space and a quiet environment
3. Manage sensory triggers: turn off lights/sirens if safe and keep the scene calm
4. Explain each step before you do it; respect personal space and approach to touch
5. Minimize touch with medical devices (BP, EKG) where possible

PEARLS

- Stimming is self-stimulatory behavior — repetitive movements, sounds, or words used to regulate emotions
- Visual communication cards can help with communication
- Caregivers know the patient's needs best — leverage their knowledge for calming
- Respect autonomy and patient rights; protect patient information (HIPAA, spelled 'HIPPA' on the original)

Take Home Message:

Slow down, quiet the scene, and work through the caregiver — simple language, extra time, minimal touch.