Dr. Eric Courchesne to Deliver 2012 ROAR Distinguished Scholar Lectures

The Center for Autism and Related Disorders at Kennedy Krieger is thrilled to welcome Dr. Eric Courchesne as the speaker for the 2012 ROAR Distinguished Lecture Series. These annual lectures, given by leaders in the field of autism research, are free to the public. Dr. Courchesne is Professor of Neurosciences in the School of Medicine at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) and Director of the UCSD Autism Center of Excellence. His Autism Center of Excellence (ACE) researches biological and behavior markers of risk for developing autism in babies and toddlers.

Dr. Courchesne’s MRI study of longitudinal development in ASD during the first years of life was named one of the Top 10 Autism Research Studies of 2010 by the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee of the

Differences in Autism Symptoms between Minority and Non-Minority Toddlers
by Saime Tek, Ph.D.

Although it is known that early detection of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is the key to accessing early intervention services, many children with ASD are not diagnosed until they are in preschool or even elementary school. There is scientific documentation that minority children with ASD tend to be diagnosed later than non-minority children. At CARD, we have been working hard to change that statistic, especially in Maryland. As part of this effort, Drs. Saime Tek and Rebecca Landa investigated the differences in early symptom presentation in toddlers with ASD from ethnic minority versus non-minority backgrounds. Within an early intervention study for toddlers with ASD at CARD, we compared 19 minority to 65 non-minority toddlers on standardized assessment measures. Most of the children participating in this study were from the upper socio-economic classes, and this was

Research Study Investigating Regression in Young Children with Autism
by Deepa Menon, M.D. and Sarah Warnet, M.S.Ed.

Recent research has focused on underlying biological processes as possible causes for autism symptoms in young children. One symptom receiving a great deal of attention is regression, or in other words, a loss of language or social skills. Some research studies have shown that regression occurs in up to 30 percent of children with autism, demonstrating the tremendous need to understand the underlying causes of regression in order to develop effective treatments.
**Director’s Welcome**

Hello everyone,

This new year has gotten off to a great start at our Center for Autism and Related Disorders. We have welcomed some staff on board and developed a new system for streamlining patients’ access to services in our clinical program. In addition, we are beginning to plan our summer programs, so please stay tuned for the announcement in the next newsletter. We have also been awarded some new grants, helping us to dig deeper into understanding how to improve the quality of life for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families. We hope that you will attend our annual ROAR Distinguished Lecture, provided this year by Dr. Eric Courchesne, who is an international leader in the neuroscience of autism. He has a brilliant way of making it easy to understand how the brain develops in children with autism, and giving us new insights into what this means for early detection and novel interventions. You don’t want to miss this!

We have also been working hard to understand why some children with autism show a regression in their development. We anticipate there being multiple causes of regression. As we investigate these causes, we will be much more efficient in discovering ways to prevent regression or to help children recover from these periods in their development.

Please put our annual ROAR fundraiser on your calendars: April 29th. ROAR is held at Oregon Ridge, and is an opportunity to meet up with friends, enjoy time in the outdoors with your family, and have whatever amount of open-air exercise you seek as you bike or hike. This important event helps us to develop new ways of diagnosing and providing interventions to improve outcomes for individuals with ASD and their family members. It also helps us train the next generation of autism researchers. I look forward to seeing you at the ROAR Distinguished Lecture on April 16th and at Oregon Ridge on April 29th.

Warm regards,

Rebecca Landa, PhD, CCC-SLP
United States Department of Health and Human Services. Autism Speaks named his Center’s recent study, led by Dr. Karen Pierce, to be one of the Top 10 Autism Studies of 2011. This study reported on the early identification of risk for autism in infants. Current functional brain imaging techniques have established links between autistic symptoms in infants and toddlers and the brain sites responsible for them. Dr. Courchesne’s studies of brain tissue have discovered clear evidence that abnormal brain development in autism begins in prenatal life.

Dr. Courchesne’s studies have resulted in over 180 publications, making him one of the most prolific researchers in the field. Dr. Courchesne’s research has been published in *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Science*, *Lancet* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* and is supported through grants from National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Autism Speaks, and the Simmons Foundation.

**Regression Study** (cont. from page 1)

CARD is thrilled to be participating in the Study of Toddlers with Autism and Regression (STAR), a multi-site research project investigating regression in young children with autism. Partnering with Dr. Alvin Loh of Surrey Place Center in Toronto, Ontario and Dr. Jill James of Arkansas Children’s Hospital Research Institute in Little Rock, Arkansas, Dr. Deepa Menon of CARD hopes to recruit 50 children with autism and regression and 50 children with autism and no history of regression. Children between the ages of 18-42 months are invited to participate in this research study. Through analysis of blood samples, the researchers hope to determine the cause of regression in young children with autism so that better treatments for these children can be developed. Specifically, the researchers will look at protein markers in the blood which show inflammation and immune activation and may cause a child to lose words or skills they had previously acquired. As part of the study, children will receive developmental assessments to confirm eligibility and lab work to look at protein markers in the blood. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Johns Hopkins Institutional Review Board. If you are interested in learning more about this research study, please contact Sarah Warnet at (443)923-7644 or warnet@kennedykrieger.org.

**Employee Spotlight**

**Garland Jones, Ph.D.**

*Dr. Garland Jones is a neuropsychologist at CARD. He began working with children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) as a graduate student at the University of Connecticut where he was mentored by Dr. Deborah Fein. He earned his doctorate degree in 2007, and completed internship and post-doctoral training at The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada. Dr. Jones begins his professional career at CARD in September 2011 as a clinical neuropsychologist. He has participated in a number of research projects involving children with an ASD (e.g., M-CHAT development and validation studies), and completed a broad range of neuropsychological training experiences, including working with children with brain tumors and sickle cell disease. Dr. Jones is also actively involved with non-profit organizations that provide academic and recreational services to underserved children and their families.*

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Autism Symptoms in Minority vs. Non-minority Children (cont. from page 1)

irrespective of ethnic membership. We found that minority children showed more severe communication delays than non-minority children as reported by their parents and as measured by clinical researchers. This may indicate that, in some cultural groups, greater levels of communication delay are tolerated before concern about development arises. We are working with professionals from Baltimore City Infants and Toddlers, as well as parents of children with ASD from ethnic minority groups to improve public awareness of the early signs of communication delay and ASD so that children may receive the earliest possible intervention. This is important to enable children to reach their highest potential. If you have an interest in helping us in this health education program about the early detection of ASD in minority communities, please call us at 443-923-7892 or email us at FurmanM@kennedykrieger.org.

Toys of the month!
by Melissa Folsom & Cathy Walton

**Infant/Toddler: Fisher Price Brilliant Basics Stack and Roll Cups:** Great for a lot of basic skills: stacking, color identification, number identification. They stack and can also be made into balls for rolling or putting things into.

**Toddler/Preschool: Fisher Price Sesame Street Elmo’s Mailbox Sorter:** Great because it can grow with the child. You can start out using it for basic skills: put in/take out, open and close...then move on to actually putting the shapes in the correct spots, and shape identification...then move on to more pretend play with mailing letters.

**Preschool / Early Grade School: Dr. Seuss I Can Do That Game:** Great game for peer interactions, imitation and turn taking.

**Elementary school age: Guess Who?** by Milton Bradley for kids 6 & up. It’s great for turn taking, asking questions, and increasing sentence length and complexity.

FREE Upcoming STAR Presentations

**Making Sense of Autism Interventions** on Wednesday, February 15, 2012 from 11:30 AM - 12:30 PM. Paula Danquah-Brobby, MS, BCBA will cover and explain commonly used/implemented, evidence-based autism interventions.

**Social Skills Intervention for High-Functioning School-Aged Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders** on Wednesday, March 14, 2012 from 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM. Presented by Drs. Amy Keefer and Amanda Santanello, with Sean Logie, this presentation will include information on interventions used to improve social interaction skills in high-functioning school-aged children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders.

**Getting an Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis: Where do I go from here?** on Monday, March 19th, 2012 from 9:30 AM to 11:00 AM. Cathy Groschan, LCSW-C, Clinical Social Worker. This is an introductory training for parents.

For more information about these FREE events visit [http://kennedykriegercard.eventbrite.com](http://kennedykriegercard.eventbrite.com).

Save the Date for a Parent Training by Dr. Landa

April 11, 2012: 11:30am-12:30pm and 5:30-6:30pm

April is Autism Awareness Month! In conjunction with Autism Awareness Month and CARD’s Annual ROAR Fundraiser, Dr. Landa will be presenting a parent training on playtime with your child. Play is much more than meets the eye. During play, children discover a great deal about concepts that are important for language and social development. This presentation will provide tips for how to play with your child and, at the same time, help your child learn. Don’t miss out on this opportunity to learn from an expert in the field of autism!