OPINION

Coming of age

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Nobody knows how many **adults have autism**, or how well they **fare in employment, independent living or overall happiness**.

We do know that more than **26,000 kids a year** are diagnosed with the disorder in the United States alone, and that between 150,000 and 300,000 of them will become adults in the next five to ten years.

Anticipating the unique needs of those rising numbers, Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston announced Monday its plans to build a center specifically for treating adults with autism. The program will be financed thanks to a $29 million gift from the **Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation**.

The new center will keep an **electronic repository of patient data** to help with future research studies, and will provide social workers to help adults with autism find jobs.

One of its more unusual goals is to teach doctors and nurses how to better interact with adults with the disorder, who may struggle to communicate their medical history, pain symptoms or dietary restrictions. A few people with autism complain that general **doctors are stern, or even fearful** of them, leading some to stick with their pediatrician well into adulthood.

There are only a couple of adult autism programs in the country, and the Mass. General effort will dwarf them in size and scope. I suspect — and hope — it will become a model for adult care at many other medical clinics.