

SPECIAL REPORT SUBARTICLE

2016's spectrum of autism science

BY SPECTRUM

26 DECEMBER 2016



Dear Readers,

It's been an eventful year, full of surprises.

At *Spectrum*, our year was more even, and the surprises were mostly pleasant as we followed the steady upward trend of autism discoveries.

After our rebranding and **relaunch in September 2015**, we embraced our new identity and website. And we were gratified to win some accolades for work we did in 2015. **The Webby Awards**, which honor excellence among websites, recognized *Spectrum* in two categories: Best Editorial Writing and Best Science Website.

Two of our **Deep Dives**, which debuted on our site late in 2015, won writing awards: “**The lost girls**,” about women with autism, was included in the 2016 “**Best American Science and Nature Writing**” anthology and won first place in its category at the **Association of Health Care Journalists** awards; and “**The missing generation**,” which chronicles the neglect of older adults with autism, won third place in its category from the same organization.

We worked hard to keep up the quality of our work this year. Our three staff reporters wrote hundreds of articles chronicling the advances in understanding autism. They also wrote hard-hitting stories that went beyond journal reports, whether about a spurious **placenta test for autism risk**, a **questionable treatment** for the condition or a series of **high-profile exits from Yale’s** Child Study Center.

We found autism relevance in broader scientific trends — for example, the increasing **push to put preprints online**. And we were inspired by scientists’ ingenuity, from the professor who began using his expertise **in autism to study the Zika virus** to the high school student who created a **device that can grow hundreds of ‘mini-brains’** at a time.

We know that behind these scientific achievements **often lies real struggle**. We put together a **special report** looking at, among other things, scientists’ efforts to **balance career and family**, the **‘two-body’ problem** for couples looking for jobs, and the insidious nature of **sexism in science**.

The report ran the same week that we made our annual pilgrimage to the **Society for Neuroscience annual meeting**. This year, our intrepid reporters wrote nearly 50 stories from the conference. Highlights included the increasing crowd of **mice missing CHD8**, the leading autism candidate gene, and a new **treatment for Rett syndrome**.

We know that many of our readers have family members with autism, so in September, we launched a **four-part series** on the connections and conflicts between scientists and families in the autism community. For the first time, we also produced a podcast to accompany the series.

Look for *Spectrum* podcasts to become a regular feature in 2017. We created some data visualizations this year — such as this one on the many **drugs in the pipeline for fragile X syndrome** — and hope to do many more next year. We also plan to forge new partnerships with scientific societies and publications.

These new initiatives are taking shape thanks to three talented people who joined **our team** this year: Rebecca Horne, our new multimedia director, is the brains behind the site’s beautiful art and interactives; Claire Cameron, our engagement editor, works hard at getting our stories the broadest readership possible; and Christina Pullano, our editorial assistant, keeps the team’s wheels moving with her impeccable organizational skills.

We hope you’ve enjoyed the work we’ve produced this year. We included many of the year’s

highlights in our year-end special report, including the best papers of 2016, trending topics and favorite quotes. We also asked scientists to reveal their most unusual sources of inspiration.

Stay with us in 2017, and we promise to keep you informed in the most enjoyable way possible. And if you have any ideas for stories, please send them to us at news@spectrumnews.org.

From all of us at *Spectrum*, we wish you happy holidays.

--**Apoorva Mandavilli** and the *Spectrum* team