## **NEWS**

## Community Newsletter: COVID-19 at INSAR, PTEN enhancer, baby sib findings

BY SPECTRUM

22 MAY 2022

This week we're back with tweets unrelated to the first in-person gathering of the **International Society for Autism Research** (INSAR) in more than three years, which ended a week ago yesterday. Well, for the most part. Some conference-goers on social media are still lamenting the spread of COVID-19 at the meeting.

News of post-INSAR positive cases — almost a "mathematical certainty," according to **Micheal Sandbank**, assistant professor of special education at the University of Texas at Austin — prompted her to pen a thoughtful 19-thread tweet about conference planning with COVID-19 as "**an ongoing reality**."

**#INSAR2022** is over and, unfortunately but predictably, several attendees are discovering they got COVID. We need to talk about conference safety and planning conferences in a future where COVID is an ongoing reality. A long ???? 1/n

- Micheal Sandbank (@MichealSandbank) May 16, 2022

The tweet even includes a link to directions for making a do-it-yourself **Corsi-Rosenthal box** to filter the air — a crafty switch-up from your standard conference prep.

This is big: filter the air! You can build an effective air filter fairly cheaply with a box fan, duct tape, and merv-13 air filters. Instead of printing a ton of programs, put all of the

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schedule/abstracts online and use that money to build CR boxes 14/n https://t.co/fhONgIGpQK

- Micheal Sandbank (@MichealSandbank) May 16, 2022

"THIS. I am still sort of reeling from lack of precautions and disregard for public health. @ AutismINSAR we can do and plan better, to protect our communities," wrote Kristen Lyall, associate professor at the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute at Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in a quote tweet.

THIS. I am still sort of reeling from lack of precautions and disregard for public health. **@AutismINSAR** we can do and plan better, to protect our communities. It's not about individual preference or risk. Masking would have been an easy thing for everyone to do to reduce spread. https://t.co/sYF3tagVYY

- Kristen Lyall, ScD (@lyallk) May 17, 2022

Alycia Halladay, chief science officer of the Autism Science Foundation, chimed in to suggest that people share such concerns with INSAR directly.

I encourage everyone to share their thoughts with INSAR directly and not via Twitter.

— Alycia Halladay (@AHalladayASF) May 17, 2022

Two days after Halladay's tweet, INSAR emailed a statement to in-person attendees, acknowledging that "unfortunately, we have been notified by a few attendees that they tested positive for COVID-19 following the event."

Autism scientists on Twitter are still trying to quantify just what "a few" means.

I think "a few attendees" is code for "it was a fucking super spreader, but whatevs" **#INSAR2022** 

Note: still negative over here! pic.twitter.com/eYISdkoqDm

The autism-linked gene PTEN starred in another popular series of tweets this week. **Christine Mayr**, associate professor of cell and developmental biology at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City, wrote a thread about her **new paper** that examines the **effects of enhancers** on the gene. By deleting an endogenous PTEN enhancer, she and her team showed that enhancers — thought to increase mRNA levels via boosted transcript production — also "regulate poly(A) site cleavage activity to control expression of mRNA transcripts with alternative 3?UTRs."

Enhancers are known to increase mRNA level. It is often assumed that this happens through increased transcript production. We deleted an endogenous enhancer of PTEN. We found that they also regulate poly(A) site cleavage activity and change expression of alternative 3?UTRs. pic.twitter.com/glzBb1djL1

- Christine Mayr (@Mayr\_Christine) May 17, 2022

Kate Galloway, Charles and Hilda Roddey Career Development Professor of chemical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, called it "nice work."

**Robert Flight**, a senior research associate at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, made the observation that even though experimentally derived rules translate to explain "how &%\*# happens across systems" in other sciences, biology serves up something a little different: "haha hold my beer while I break those assumptions!"

Every other science: Look at these experimentally derived rules from one example that govern how &%\*# happens across systems.

Biology: haha hold my beer while I break those assumptions! https://t.co/SOyzhg28pL

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— Dr. Robert M Flight (@rmflight) May 17, 2022

The **Infant Brain Imaging Study** (IBIS), too, **tweeted about new work** this past week that documents **"associations between 6-month brain networks** that may support error-based learning and later ASD-associated behaviors."

A new paper from Zoe Hawks documents observed associations between 6-month brain networks that may support error-based learning and later ASD-associated behaviors, suggesting promising avenues for future theoretically-informed studies of ASD.https://t.co/ssNkMX8JTC

- IBIS Network (@ibis\_research) May 17, 2022

Spectrum covered two other new sets of findings that **draw on IBIS data** presented at INSAR last week.

That's it for this week's Community Newsletter! If you have any suggestions for interesting social posts you saw in the autism research sphere, feel free to send an email to **news@spectrumnews.org**.

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Cite this article: https://doi.org/10.53053/DAJU2861