

SPOTTED

Autism author; new leadership; cannabis crush and more

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WEEK OF JULY 10TH

Autism author

Naoki Higashida, who has autism and is the **author of “The Reason I Jump,”** has a new book out: **“Fall Down 7 Times Get Up 8.”** Writer **David Mitchell** and his wife **KA Yoshida** translated both books from Japanese into English. Mitchell, author of “Cloud Atlas,” wrote 7 July in The Guardian that Higashida’s books have helped him and Yoshida **better understand their own son with autism.**

The Toronto Star ran an excerpt from Higashida’s book on 9 July. In the **wide-ranging section,** Higashida talks about laughing, banging his head, obstacles in his life, and friendship.

“I would like people to stop pressuring children to make friends,” he writes. “Whether or not we have lots of friends, every single one of us is the main protagonist of our own existence. Having no friends is nothing to be ashamed of. Let’s all follow and be true to our singular path through life.”

SOURCES:

The Guardian / 08 Jul 2017

David Mitchell: What my son's autism has taught me

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/08/david-mitchell-son-autism-diagnosis-advice>**The**

Toronto Star / 09 Jul 2017

Author of teen autism memoir grows up but can't escape heartbreak

<https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2017/07/09/author-of-teen-autism-memoir-grows-up-but-cant-escape-heartbreakautistic-author-explains-what-can-break-his-heart.html>

New leadership

The Trump administration has named Brenda Fitzgerald, **currently Georgia's public health commissioner**, to head up the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *The New York Times* reported 7 July that Fitzgerald is an OB-GYN who has **twice run for Congress as a Republican** but is considered a moderate.

Fitzgerald has “strong ties” to two Trump associates from Georgia: Tom Price, secretary of Health and Human Services, and former Speaker of the House **Newt Gingrich**, according to the *Times*. She has **raised some eyebrows** over her lack of scientific research experience and her promotion of controversial anti-aging therapies in her private practice, according to an editorial in *Nature* on Wednesday. However, she also has a reputation as an effective leader known for prioritizing maternal and child health.

SOURCES:

The New York Times / 07 Jul 2017

Georgia's health commissioner named to lead C.D.C.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/07/health/cdc-brenda-fitzgerald.html>

Nature / 12 Jul 2017

Proposed U.S. public-health chief is a champion for women and children
<https://www.nature.com/news/proposed-us-public-health-chief-is-a-champion-for-women-and-children-1.22282>

Budget bypass

A U.S. House of Representatives spending subcommittee has **largely ignored most of the steep reductions** in the Trump administration's proposed science budget for 2018. The House proposal includes a limited reduction for the National Science Foundation and little change for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration from its 2017 allocation, *Nature* reported 28 June.

SOURCES:

Nature News / 28 Jun 2017

U.S. lawmakers' science spending plans ignore Trump cuts

<http://www.nature.com/news/us-lawmakers-science-spending-plans-ignore-trump-cuts-1.22226>

Evaporating appointments

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and a “commission on vaccine safety and scientific integrity” are on a 7 July *Business Insider* list of **putative Trump administration plans that have evaporated** since

the presidential election. Kennedy **announced the appointment and commission** on 10 January following a meeting with Trump, but neither has since transpired.

SOURCES:

Business Insider / 07 Jul 2017

The Trump appointees that weren't: Some White House job offers that didn't pan out
<http://www.businessinsider.com/white-house-job-offers-that-didnt-pan-out-2017-7>

Stem cell caution

An international group of 15 researchers has called for tighter global regulations on stem cell treatments. Writing in *Science Translational Medicine* on 5 July, the scientists express concern about the **dangers of inappropriate marketing of the unproven therapies**. Such treatments have **interested some in the autism community** but continue to be a minefield of unknowns.

SOURCES:

Science Translational Medicine / 05 Jul 2017

Marketing of unproven stem cell-based interventions: A call to action
<http://stm.sciencemag.org/content/9/397/eaag0426.full>

Murine misstep

Two Vanderbilt University researchers have **retracted their own 2016 paper** after discovering that they used the wrong transgenic mouse line for their work. **Maureen Gannon** and **Raymond Pasek** contacted *Retraction Watch*, which reported 12 July on the pair's decision to pull their paper from the *American Journal of Physiology – Endocrinology and Metabolism*.

The researchers said they were “devastated” at their discovery but felt it was crucial to acknowledge the mistake. “Honesty is always the best policy,” they told *Retraction Watch*. “Especially in today’s climate of ‘fake news’ and science being under attack. The scientific community and the public needs to trust published scientific results.”

SOURCES:

Retraction Watch / 12 Jul 2017

“We were devastated:” Authors retract paper after realizing they had used the wrong mice
<http://retractionwatch.com/2017/07/12/devastated-authors-retract-paper-realizing-used-wrong->

mice/

College transition

Almost 70 percent of people with autism **do not complete college**. This sobering statistic compelled **Susan White** of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and her colleagues **developed a program called STEPS** (Stepped Transition in Education Program for Students with ASD) that provides support from high school into college.

Satisfaction with STEPS in an ongoing randomized controlled trial is “quite high,” the researchers write in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

SOURCES:

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders / 06 Jul 2017

Development of a college transition and support program for students with autism spectrum disorder

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10803-017-3236-8>

Electrified neurons

Electrical current can draw human neural stem cells **away from their usual destinations** in rat brains, according to results published 29 June in *Stem Cell Reports*. The cells also differentiate into various cell types, including **microglia**. The findings raise the possibility of luring cells to different brain regions to repair areas of damage.

SOURCES:

Stem Cell Reports / 29 Jun 2017

Electrical guidance of human stem cells in the rat brain

[http://www.cell.com/stem-cell-reports/fulltext/S2213-6711\(17\)30262-X](http://www.cell.com/stem-cell-reports/fulltext/S2213-6711(17)30262-X)

Researcher detained

A Boston Children’s Hospital cancer researcher from Iran and his family were detained at Boston Logan International Airport on 10 July.

The researcher, Mohsen Dehnavi, **has a J-1 visa for visiting scholars**, according to *The Boston Globe*. He and his wife and three children, ages 7 months, 3 and 6 years old, were detained for several hours before being sent back to Iran, the *Globe* reported. U.S. Customs and Border Protection has not specified a reason for the deportations.

SOURCES:

The Boston Globe / 11 Jul 2017

Iranian cancer researcher not allowed back into US

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/07/11/iranian-cancer-researcher-detained-logan-airport/RNbAWC5zqOxahU4AdNz6vN/story.html>

Spectrum hero

Samuel Hookham, a young gamer with autism, detected similarities between himself and **Symmetra**, a character in the **popular video game “Overwatch.”** As part of a project for his high school English class, Samuel wrote to famed game designer **Jeffrey Kaplan**, who oversaw development of “Overwatch,” asking about the character. Kaplan confirmed that Symmetra is indeed on the spectrum, reported *Wired* on 12 July.

Symmetra is a 28-year-old woman from India named Satya Vaswani who uses a photon projector to bend light, as befits a character on the spectrum.

SOURCES:

Wired / 12 Jul 2017

The sleeper autistic hero transforming video games

<https://www.wired.com/story/the-sleeper-autistic-hero-transforming-video-games/>

Goodwill ambassador

The World Health Organization has named **Saima Wazed Hossain** as its **Goodwill Ambassador for Autism in South-East Asia Region**. Hossain, a native of Bangladesh, has worked for several years championing the integration of the needs of people with autism into the region’s health and socioeconomic development plans.

SOURCES:

World Health Organization / 06 Jul 2017

Saima Hossain is WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Autism in South-East Asia Region
<http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/releases/2017/1652/en/>

News tips

Do you have a new paper coming out? Are you making a career move? Did you see a study or news story that you want to share? Send your news tips to news@spectrumnews.org.
