

SPOTTED

Calming remedies; labor lessons; women wanted

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Calming remedies

Several drug companies are experimenting with new ways to tweak the activities of a chemical in the brain that quiets neural activity. Targeting the so-called ‘inhibitory **neurotransmitter**’ gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) could lead to drugs for conditions from dementia to autism.

New approaches for developing GABA drugs are more targeted than previous ones, homing in on **specific receptors**, according to a story published last week by *STAT*.

One pharmaceutical startup aims at a GABA receptor in the hippocampus, the brain’s memory and learning center. Overactivity in the hippocampus is linked to memory loss, schizophrenia and autism. A GABA modulator under development at the biotech firm **AgeneBio** dampens that activity as a potential treatment for neurodegenerative disease, *STAT* reports.

Another pharmaceutical company is developing a drug to treat people with either **Angelman syndrome**, a developmental disorder related to autism, or **fragile X syndrome**, the most common single-gene cause of autism.

SOURCES:

STAT / 22 Jul 2016

How tinkering with a mellow messenger in the brain could yield new drugs

<https://www.statnews.com/2016/07/22/brain-gaba-drugs/>

Labor lessons

Children born to mothers **whose labor was induced** are not at a higher risk for autism than children born without induction, according to a study published Monday of all live births in Sweden that occurred between 1992 and 2005.

The finding, based on 1,362,950 births, runs counter to the widely discussed findings from a 2013 study of **625,042 live births recorded in North Carolina**.

The new study compared autism risk between siblings born to the same mother in cases where the mother's labor was induced with one child but not the other. This approach allowed the researchers to control for genetic and environmental factors that might be involved.

Decisions about whether to induce labor should not weigh any risk for autism, as there is none, the researchers wrote in *JAMA Pediatrics*.

SOURCES:

JAMA Pediatrics / 25 Jul 2016

Association of labor induction with offspring risk in autism

<http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2534479>

Women wanted

Researchers tasked with evaluating applicants for teaching jobs in France **give higher scores to women** aspiring to work in male-dominated fields, such as math, physics or philosophy, according to a study published Thursday in *Science*. And evaluators tend to up the grades for men going for jobs in female-dominated domains, such as literature and foreign language.

The findings suggest an unconscious effort to rebalance the representation of men and women in certain jobs.

In France, the hiring of teachers and professors involves two stages. First, applicants take a written exam, which is gender-blind. Top candidates advance to an in-person oral exam, where the gender-related bias showed up. The researchers compared the men's and women's performances on both tests and looked for trends.

The results, based on 100,000 people who took the exams between 2006 and 2013, rule out discrimination as the cause of the underrepresentation of women in science and related fields, write Thomas Breda and Mélina Hillion of the Paris School of Economics.

Attempts to level the playing field should involve counteracting gender stereotypes early in life,

Breda and Hillion write. And recruiters in France should let women know that they have as good a chance as a man, or maybe better, at landing teaching jobs in male-dominated fields.

SOURCES:

Science / 28 Jul 2016

Teaching accreditation exams reveal grading biases favor women in male-dominated disciplines in France

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/353/6298/474>

Personalized prescriptions

The National Institutes of Health plans to start **recruiting one million volunteers** as soon as November to kick off a 10-year **Precision Medicine Initiative**, according a story published Saturday in *The New York Times*.

Its goal is twofold: to amass a huge set of biomedical research data and to develop treatments tailored to individuals. Participants agree to provide blood and a medical history along with personal and lifestyle information.

In return, participants will receive access to all the information collected about them, as well as the results of their lab and genetic tests.

Researchers plan to use the data to better understand the causes of disease and, ultimately, to devise personalized treatments based on an individual's biomedical profile.

People will be able to sign up by computer or through a call center. Researchers also will recruit participants through healthcare providers and community health centers.

SOURCES:

New York Times / 23 Jul 2016

Uncle Sam wants you — or at least your genetic and lifestyle data

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/24/us/politics/precision-medicine-initiative-volunteers.html?_r=1

Reviewer taxonomy

In a tongue-in-cheek editorial, a geography researcher has **cast peer reviewers into six types**.

Kevin Ward, who is also a journal editor, has reviewed hundreds of papers and read hundreds more. Last month in *Urban Geography*, Ward created sketches of “enthusiastic and supportive,” “bitter and twisted” and too-brief reviewers.

There’s also the veteran who laments that it was better “in my day,” and a self-absorbed reviewer who demands citations of his or her own work. “The annoying reviewer” asks for revisions of revisions that amount to moving the goalposts, Ward writes.

In a Monday post on *Retraction Watch*, commenters chimed in to expand the taxonomy. They cite **the jealous type**, who enjoys poking holes in others’ work, and clueless reviewers who miss errors and make comments that reveal their lack of expertise in a field.

On a serious note, Ward advises scientists to reflect critically upon their reviews and to think about editors who must read all of the reviews, not just yours.

SOURCES:

Urban Geography / 23 May 2016

Towards a typology of academic peer review styles

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02723638.2016.1190559>**Retraction Watch** / 25 Jul 2016

From annoying to bitter, here are the six types of peer reviewers

<http://retractionwatch.com/2016/07/25/from-annoying-to-bitter-here-are-the-six-types-of-peer-reviewers/>

Job Moves

Joshua A. Gordon, associate professor of psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center, will be the new director of the National Institute of Mental Health. Gordon will succeed **Thomas Insel**, who stepped down as director last year. Insel is now director of clinical neuroscience at Verily (formerly Google Life Sciences).

Making a career change? Send your news to jobmoves@spectrumnews.org.
