

**SPOTTED**

# Family resemblance; accounting for diversity; drug dearth

BY SPECTRUM

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## WEEK OF JANUARY 2<sup>ND</sup>

### Family resemblance

An article in *The Guardian* last week highlights how a growing number of women who have children with autism are **recognizing the condition in themselves** after researching their child's features.

"These women are coming to prominence now because there's more information on autism in girls and women on the internet, so they can research their children and in doing so, diagnose themselves," **Judith Gould**, lead consultant at the Lorna Wing Centre for Autism in Bromley, U.K., told the newspaper.

A 2015 article by *Spectrum's* Apoorva Mandavilli explored how women with autism are often **misunderstood or missed altogether**. There is debate as to whether autism **affects more boys and men** than girls and women, or whether it simply **manifests differently** in the two sexes.

The *Guardian* article describes Rachel Cotton — a 45-year-old woman who found out that she has autism after her daughter was diagnosed. Cotton says having her own diagnosis has made her a better mother.

"Because I have autism, my children know it's natural to feel what they feel," she says.

#### SOURCES:

**The Guardian** / 25 Dec 2016

Autism: 'hidden pool' of undiagnosed mothers with condition emerging

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/26/autism-hidden-pool-of-undiagnosed-mothers-with-condition-emerging>

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## Accounting for diversity

The accounting firm EY, formerly Ernst & Young, has joined the ranks of companies angling to **hire adults on the spectrum**, *The Atlantic* reported last week. The pilot program involves recruitment as well as onboarding and training programs adapted to the needs of people with autism.

Although the initiative may benefit young adults with autism — about half of whom **are unemployed** — this is business, not altruism. Company leaders believe that a cognitively diverse workplace will boost productivity. They want to tap into talents such as attention to detail, mathematical ability and spotting anomalies in data.

Large companies, including the software giant SAP, HP and **Microsoft, have similar reasons** for hiring employees with autism. The program at EY is small, yielding four hires so far.

Sam Briefer is one of the new recruits. “I’m so happy with where I am right now,” Briefer told *The Atlantic*. “I feel like as long as I’m continuing to be a strong team player and someone who is always ready to step up and lead anything, that will be a great asset to my team.”

### SOURCES:

**The Atlantic** / 28 Dec 2016

Why some companies are trying to hire more people on the autism spectrum

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/12/autism-workplace/510959/>

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## Extraordinary minds

With dwindling funding opportunities and **more competition** than ever, it’s hard for young researchers to make their mark. But *Forbes* magazine highlighted a few such scientists this week in their ‘**30 Under 30**’ — a list of the “brightest young entrepreneurs, innovators and game changers” aged 29 and younger.

One of the notable scientists is **Melissa Gymrek**, assistant professor of computer science and engineering at the University of California, San Diego. As a postdoctoral researcher working with **Mark Daly** and **Yaniv Erlich** at the Broad Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Gymrek tackled one of the biggest challenges facing geneticists: accurately sequencing **short repeated regions of DNA** that normally trip up gene-sequencing technology. Her work, published last year in *Nature Genetics*, will allow researchers to understand how these pervasive repeats affect the genome.

Another honoree, **Korin Reid**, senior data scientist at the healthcare consulting company **McKesson**, developed a machine-learning algorithm to glean new insights from the healthcare

records of 160 million people.

A third 30-under-30 pick, **Monica Rosenberg**, is still a graduate student in **Marvin Chun's** lab at Yale University. Her work, published last year in *Nature Neuroscience*, showed that brain scans can predict how well people **can hold and sustain their focus**. The study raises the possibility of using technology to predict and even alter a person's behavior — “a formidable challenge for neuroimaging,” **according to an editorial** by clinical neuroscientist **Stephen Smith** that accompanied the study.

**SOURCES:**

**Forbes** / 03 Jan 2017

Forbes 30 under 30: Science

<http://www.forbes.com/30-under-30-2017/science/#73da20992eb4>

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## Drug dearth

New drug approvals slowed to a trickle last year, *STAT* reported last week. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave the **nod to just 20 new medicines**, 65 percent fewer than 2015 and the lowest number in nearly a decade.

Both regulators and the pharmaceutical industry had a hand in staunching the flow of new remedies, *STAT* reported. The agency rejected a lot more medications, which were also held up by manufacturing problems. The FDA's push to speed approvals also meant some of them that might have been counted this year were in the numbers for 2015. Similar math should apply for this year, however.

In any case, most expect the slump to be brief. “I think FDA is expecting a bounce-back year in 2017 from their public comments based on submissions with decision dates next year,” **Ramsey Baghdadi**, co-founder of Washington analysis firm Prevision Policy, said in an email to *STAT*.

On the approval docket are a multiple sclerosis medication from Roche, an eczema drug from Sanofi and Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, and several cancer drugs.

**SOURCES:**

**STAT** / 30 Dec 2016

FDA drug approvals plummeted this year, but 2017 is looking rosier

<https://www.statnews.com/2016/12/30/fda-drug-approvals-plummeted/>

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## Job news

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