

SPOTTED

Genetic hotspot; big brain collaboration; funding fall and more

BY EMILY WILLINGHAM

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Genetic hotspot

The **hunt for DNA hotspots** associated with autism may be heating up. Researchers comparing genetic sequences between people with and without autism have found eight autism-linked mutations clustered in a **gene called TRIO**. TRIO's primary role is to regulate connections among neurons in the brain. The findings were published 19 September in *Nature Communications*.

The TRIO protein interacts with RAC1, which has **already been implicated** in animal models of autism. Mutations in TRIO yield a protein that either over- or underperforms, at least in cultured rat neurons. The result is that neurons interact too much or too little with each other.

SOURCES:

Nature Communications / 17 Sep 2017

An autism spectrum disorder-related de novo mutation hotspot discovered in the GEF1 domain of TRIO

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-017-00472-0>

Big brain collaboration

The International Brain Lab, a virtual collaboration of 21 research groups, launched on 19 September. The goal of the collaboration is to study the whole brain as it relates to a single behavior. The investigators will begin by focusing on **foraging behavior in mice**, *Nature News* reported.

SOURCES:

Nature News / 19 Sep 2017

Researchers unite in quest for 'standard model' of the brain

<http://www.nature.com/news/researchers-unite-in-quest-for-standard-model-of-the-brain-1.22647>

Gag order

A public affairs officer at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued a gag order to all staff. Employees must **route all interactions** with reporters, even “the most basic of data requests,” through the headquarters’ communications office. Journalists view the edict as “really disturbing,” *Columbia Journalism Review* reported on 13 September.

SOURCES:

Columbia Journalism Review / 13 Sep 2017

CDC official sends troubling message to employees about media questions

https://www.cjr.org/covering_the_health_care_fight/cdc-health-reporters-journalism.php

Sibling vaccination rates

Younger siblings of children with autism are less likely than their **brothers and sisters with the condition** to be vaccinated, according to a research letter published 14 September in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. There was no difference in vaccination rates between children with and without autism, however.

Autism in an older child also affected rates of vaccine reaction reports from parents. Parents of children with autism are more likely than those with neurotypical children to report adverse vaccine reactions in their child with autism. They are also more likely to report vaccine reactions in their unaffected children who have older siblings on the spectrum. These retrospective reports include fever, unusual crying and diarrhea.

SOURCES:

New England Journal of Medicine / 14 Sep 2017

Vaccination rates among younger siblings of children with autism

<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc1708223>

Funding fall

The advocacy organization Autism Speaks is **cutting grant funding** in the wake of an 18 percent drop in revenue in 2016. The total decrease in revenue was about \$10.5 million, leading to grant-spending cuts of about \$1.8 million and a similar decrease in payroll outlay, *Disability Scoop* reported on 14 September.

SOURCES:

Disability Scoop / 14 Sep 2017

Autism Speaks reports double-digit revenue slide

<https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2017/09/14/autism-speaks-revenue-slide/24165/>

'Troubling' exclusion

The proportion of children with autism in the United Kingdom who are being **excluded from school** is on the rise. Autism charities have called the 36.4 percent increase in permanent school exclusions "incredibly troubling." They say the figure is probably an underestimate, as school exclusion is illegal, *HuffPost United Kingdom* reported 15 September.

SOURCES:

HuffPost United Kingdom / 15 Sep 2017

Number of children with autism being excluded has risen and it's 'incredibly troubling'

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/children-with-autism-exclusions_uk_59bbaa0be4b02da0e140ff7f

Police training

Negative interactions between **police and people with autism** are "terrifyingly common" and often the result of misunderstanding, "**Neurotribes**" author Steve Silberman writes in a 19 September *New York Times* op-ed. Silberman details several frightening examples of such encounters and calls for better autism education among law enforcement officers to reduce escalations.

One example Silberman gives involves a 14-year-old boy with autism named Connor, who encountered a policeman while waiting for his caregiver in a neighborhood park. The caregiver later realized that the policeman had mistaken Connor's repeated sniffing of a piece of yarn for

“drug intoxication.”

SOURCES:

The New York Times / 19 Sep 2017

The police need to understand autism

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/19/opinion/police-autism-understanding.html>

Disability drawback

If you ask children with disabilities what the worst aspects of their lives are, you might get some unexpected answers. A Canadian rehabilitation hospital asked just that question as part of a public relations campaign. The children’s responses focused most on **problems with stigma** and how people react to and interact with them, *HuffPost Canada* reported 13 September.

The children’s quoted responses include, “Whispering is rarely as discreet as you think it is,” and “If someone communicates differently than you, still say, ‘Hi.’”

SOURCES:

HuffPost Canada / 13 Sep 2017

Kids with disabilities speak out on the worst part of their lives

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/09/13/kids-with-disabilities-stigma_a_23207846/

Intervention expansion

After a successful trial of a parent-based autism **intervention in India**, the health organization **Sangath** is planning its next step. The organization plans to use two major grants to evaluate how successfully frontline healthcare workers **deliver the intervention** in the state of Madhya Pradesh, the *Hindustan Times* reported 14 September.

SOURCES:

Hindustan Times / 14 Sep 2017

NGO to implement indigenously developed psycho therapies for autism and depression in India

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/health/ngo-to-implement-indigenously-developed-psycho-therapies-for-autism-and-depression-in-india/story-x4e6A6VaDmoNioa3FynqEM.html>

Authentic actors

The BBC children's channel CBeebies and the Irish children's channel RTEjr. are rolling out a new series about characters with autism. Other shows on CBeebies have included characters on the spectrum, but in the new animated series "Pablo," people with autism **voice all of the core characters**. The show's website also features 12 film shorts giving different perspectives from people on the spectrum, the BBC said in a statement on 14 September.

SOURCES:

BBC / 14 Sep 2017

Pablo

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2017/pablo>

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**.
