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Spotted: Brain boom; cure conundrum

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20 FEBRUARY 2015

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 16TH

Brain boom

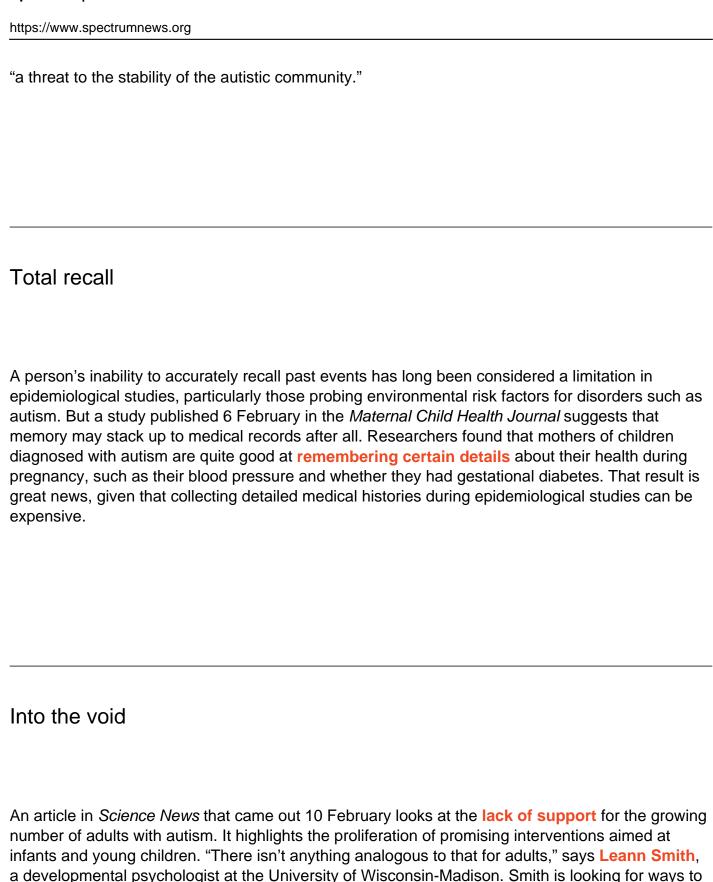
In the 2 March issue of *Forbes*, an article forecasts a **boom in 'brain medicines'** — drugs to treat a range of neurodegenerative and psychiatric disorders, including autism. The article highlights work by **Ricardo Dolmetsch**, global head of neuroscience at the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research in Boston, who helped to pioneer a new stem-cell-based system to screen drugs for the autism-linked disorder **Timothy syndrome**. "I want to restart neuroscience," he told *Forbes*. Dolmetsch, **whom we profiled** several years ago, was inspired to study autism after his son was diagnosed with the disorder.

Cure conundrum

A long article published 18 February in *Newsweek* tackles **a touchy topic in autism**: Is it a disorder to be cured, or a difference to be celebrated? For Jonathan Mitchell, a 59-year-old with autism, the answer is simple. "It's a horrible disability," he says. "I wish there were a cure." People on the other side of the fence, dubbed neurodiversity advocates, call Mitchell "a hater" and

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ease the transition into adulthood, which has been likened to "falling off a cliff" because of the sudden dearth of services. Reducing stress among young adults with autism by teaching them

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coping strategies and problem-solving skills is one way she hopes to help them find jobs and make friends.

Necessary noise

One theory about autism holds that the **brain is unusually 'noisy'** in people with the disorder, showing patterns of signaling that are more variable than those seen in controls. But a new paper, published 19 February in *Autism*, argues that this idiosyncrasy, dubbed 'neural noise,' may actually be **lacking in people with autism**. The paper outlines how a certain level of neural noise makes it easier to switch attention between tasks and look beyond details to see the big picture — behaviors that are challenging for people with autism.

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