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Spotted: Insel's move; disclosure fail

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Insel's move

Thomas Insel is stepping down as director of the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) after 13 years in the position. He announced his departure from the agency, slated for 1 November, in an email to colleagues earlier this week.

"The NIMH has accomplished so much during this past decade — progress in neuroscience, progress in diagnostics and therapeutics, and, most of all, progress towards a focus on the needs of people with serious mental illness," he wrote. "To be able to work on such important problems with such talented people has been the high point of my professional career."

Insel plans to join the Google Life Sciences team at Alphabet (formerly Google). We wish him well there, but we will miss him. He always made time to weigh in on important topics, sitting down for a **Q&A on autism treatments** and participating in a **live panel on diagnostic changes**. In 2013, he made waves through the autism research community when he announced that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) would **move away from funding projects** that use diagnostic criteria laid out in the "**Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders**."

Bruce Cuthbert, former director of the NIMH Division of Adult Translational Research and Treatment Development, will **serve as the agency's acting director** until a permanent replacement is named, according to an NIH statement.

SOURCES:

National Institutes of Health / 15 Sep 2015

NIH director's statement regarding Dr. Thomas Insel's departure

http://www.nih.gov/about/director/09152015_statement_insel.htm

Sexy squeaks

Male mice are known to squeak for sex, but females' cries have mostly gone unheard. Apparently **female mice squeak back** when they're interested: When they squeak, they slow down, making it easier for the males to put on the moves.

The study, which is getting **plenty of press** this week, was actually published in May, and we reported on it as far back as 2013. At the time, the researchers told us that one reason they didn't heed the females' squeaks is that they **couldn't distinguish them from the males'**.

"We've never been able to say which mouse was which," **Joshua Neunuebel**, assistant professor of psychological brain sciences at the University of Delaware, told us at the **2013 Society for Neuroscience annual meeting**.

Neunuebel and his colleagues developed an 'ultrasonic microphone array' to capture squeaks in a cage of mice and then suss out their sources. This system could help researchers uncover whether courtship — a social behavior — is altered in mouse models of autism.

SOURCES:

eLife / 28 May 2015

Female mice ultrasonically interact with males during courtship displays

<http://elifesciences.org/content/4/e06203>

Code overload

More than 100,000 **new medical billing codes** are set to roll out 1 October, *The New York Times* reported this week. Among them are W58.13 — crushed by a crocodile — and V97.33 — sucked into a jet engine.

The codes are from the 10th revision of the **International Classification of Diseases**, dubbed ICD-10. Although the ICD-10 has been around since 1990, doctors in the U.S. are switching to the codes only now. The goal is to provide specific information about their patients to private insurers and government programs, such as Medicaid.

"The number of codes is exploding," Michael R. Marks, an orthopedic surgeon in Connecticut, told *The New York Times*. "We will be speaking a new language. It's like switching to German, after speaking English for 30 years."

Codes F84.0 and F84.1 in the ICD refer to autism and a third, F84.5, to **Asperger syndrome**.

Doctors will still consider Asperger syndrome to be part of autism for diagnostic purposes, per the “**Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders**,” however.

SOURCES:

The New York Times / 13 Sep 2015

One symptom in new medical codes: Doctor anxiety

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/14/us/politics/one-symptom-in-new-medical-codes-doctor-anxiety.html>

Disclosure fail

In 2012, the NIH created a **conflict-of-interest policy** that requires researchers applying for federal funds to report any industry ties to their institutions. The onus was then on the researchers’ institutions to decide whether the ties were problematic.

A new analysis by *Nature* suggests this policy has **had little effect** on the number of conflicts reported to the NIH. Although researchers are more forthcoming about potential conflicts than they were before the policy, their institutions rarely find them to be problematic.

“There’s a lot more financial conflict of interest in my view than the NIH is getting from the reports of universities,” **Sheldon Krimsky**, Lenore Stern Professor in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, told *Nature*. “We’re just seeing the tip of the iceberg.”

Universities spent millions integrating the new policy. The NIH plans to review the regulations later this year.

SOURCES:

Nature / 15 Sep 2015

NIH disclosure rules falter

<http://www.nature.com/news/nih-disclosure-rules-falter-1.18358>

Risperdal reveal

A 15-part series by Highline, *The Huffington Post’s* home for investigative journalism, explores the **sordid history of Risperdal** — Johnson & Johnson’s (J&J) blockbuster drug approved for use in children with autism.

Part 1 of the series, published earlier this week, cites **J&J's early credo**: Patients first. Profits last. "But the world in which Johnson & Johnson thrives today seems to have corroded the credo," writes Steven Brill, author of the 5,000 word 'chapter.'

The article delves into the story of a boy with autism who grew size 46DD breasts after taking Risperdal. At the time, J&J was illegally encouraging doctors to prescribe the drug to children. In February, a jury ordered the company to pay \$2.5 million in damages to the boy's family.

We reported in August that J&J may have **downplayed the risks of Risperdal in children** by omitting crucial data from a 2003 study. *The Huffington Post* story shines a light on the closed-door investor meetings that may have sparked such decisions.

SOURCES:

Huffington Post Highline / 17 Sep 2015

America's most admired lawbreaker

<http://highline.huffingtonpost.com/miracleindustry/americas-most-admired-lawbreaker/chapter-1.html>
