

CART Connection

News from the UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment

Fall 2015, Vol. 7

New Grants Awarded:

Study aims to bring evidence-based research practices to communities through the U.S.

Connie Kasari, PhD, UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment faculty and principal investigator, obtained funding for the Autism Intervention Research Network for Behavioral Health (AIR-B) for the third time since 2008. AIR-B 3 continues to focus on intervention services for children with ASD and their families who have limited access to services. Over the past several years our AIR-B team has forged partnerships with school districts and health care professionals across the country with the goal of bringing effective treatments into the community settings where children with ASD spend the most time. We continue this goal in the new AIR-B grant.

Our focus is on families with children with autism living in under-resourced communities who



Connie Kasari, PhD, Principal Investigator and faculty at UCLA CART

must navigate the complex world of evaluations, diagnoses, interventions and resources. Over the next five years, our AIR-B team will conduct research, develop tools, and disseminate information into the community.

We have proposed two research studies. We recognize that the process of screening, evaluation, and treatment for children with autism can be long and arduous - especially for families in under-resourced settings.

African-American and Latino children with autism tend to be diagnosed later in life than

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Did you know?

A diagnosis of ASD now includes several conditions that used to be diagnosed separate: autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger syndrome. Now all of these conditions are called autism spectrum disorder.

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Mission Statement

The mission of the UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment is to continue to play a leading role, both nationally and internationally, in efforts to develop an improved understanding of the biological basis of autism, so as to improve diagnosis and to develop new, more effective treatments for autism spectrum disorders across the lifespan. We hope to achieve these goals by fostering a strong collaborative environment for basic and applied research, as well as a challenging, but supportive environment for trainees.





Photos from the annual CART symposium: Advances in Autism 2015. The conference was held at UCLA's Neuroscience Research Center on May 22, 2015.

Ask an Expert with Amanda Guslrud, PhD

QUESTION: What are the challenges regarding early detection of ASD?

ANSWER: Detection of ASD in young infants and toddlers can be a difficult and complex endeavor for many reasons. One reason is that the earliest signs are not always the most obvious signs for a caregiver or professional to identify. For example, young children may show a subtle absence of social behaviors, such as not engaging in back and forth smiles and laughter or not using early gestures to communicate, in contrast to more overt or obvious signs, such as hand-flapping, that often emerge later in development. This means that the earliest signs may go undetected for longer and careful attention by a trained professional is oftentimes warranted. Another complicating factor is that while some young children show a complete lack of social-communication skill, others are able to display a lower quality skill that may mask early identification. For example, the child may point to request a desired item but this gesture may be rarely paired with eye-contact or vocalization, or may occur infrequently or in a limited number of social contexts. It is important to remember as a parent or professional that there is not one single indicator of ASD, instead it is a constellation of behaviors that cause significant impairment for the child and family. Early detection of the core features of ASD can lead to increased access to proven early intervention techniques. At CART, we have an early intervention study which provides free screening and intervention for 12-21 month olds who qualify. We aim to better understand the developmental pathways and treatment response of early features of ASD in our youngest children. For more information please visit the CART website www.autism.ucla.edu or call 310-206-1268.

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caucasian children – the differences can be as great as four or five years, which can cause them to miss out on important early intervention. In our first study, *Mind the Gap*, we will try to explore the causes of this delay to obtaining access to care. We will then help facilitate the process of getting families services and try to lessen the gap between identification and service access. This support will be provided in each families' native language and through the use of phone and video technology. This will allow busy families to access support on their own schedule.

Our second study, *Building Better Bridges*, will address the needs of children who are transitioning to new stages of schooling. Moving from early intervention to elementary school, or subsequently from elementary to secondary school can be worrying and stressful to both children with autism and their parents. Through *Building Better Bridges*, we will tackle the obstacles complicating these transitions. Our research groups will work together to provide interventions that will help make the transitions a lot easier.

For both studies, we will work with local community partners, regional centers, school districts, and parents of children with ASD. Our AIR-B research partner, Healthy African American Families, a community based non-profit health agency led by Loretta Jones, CEO will help us design

interventions that are culturally tailored and effective for the participants in each of our communities. "This is very much an equal partnership and endeavor. Healthy African American Families will help train all of us to ensure that the work will be both culturally sensitive and effective over the long term," says Dr. Kasari.

Our AIR-B 3 study is led by university researchers at UCLA (Connie Kasari, PhD, Sheryl Kataoka, PhD, Amanda Gulsrud, PhD), University of Pennsylvania (David Mandell, PhD, Melanie Pellecchia, PhD), University of Rochester (Tristram Smith, PhD, Suzanne Iadarola, PhD), Drexel University (Elizabeth McGhee-Hassrick, PhD) and UC Davis, Mind Institute (Aubyn Stahmer, PhD, Peter Mundy, PhD).

Updates from the CAN Clinic

We are pleased to announce that the UCLA Child and Adult Neurodevelopment (CAN) Clinic has received a generous donation from the Sydney D. Holland Foundation to establish a scholarship program for individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders and their families. This scholarship will help families with financial need gain access to evaluation and treatment at the clinic. We wish to thank the Sydney D. Holland Foundation for this important contribution to the CAN clinic and to the families we serve.

The CAN Clinic includes a multidisciplinary team of experts. Psychologists are trained to the highest standards of assessment, cognitive testing, and treatment (ABA, DTT, PRT therapies). Psychiatrists provide leading testing of medical treatments for developmental disorders. Pediatric neurologists focus on the comprehensive health care needs of patients with neurodevelopmental disorders. Speech therapists have expertise in evaluation and speech therapy of language delays. For more information about the clinic, please call: 310-794-4008.

The Infant-Sibling Study



Dr. Mirella Dapretto and Post Doctural Scholar Dr. Shulamite Green during an assessment - part of the Infant Sibling Study

"In our 'Infant-Sibling Study,' we are using a variety of innovative methods, including eye-tracking, electrophysiology (EEG), and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), in addition to behavioral testing"

As part of our UCLA Autism Center of Excellence, our research team has been studying early markers of autism by tracking social, cognitive, and brain development of infants with and without a family history of ASD from birth to 3 years of age. Although behavioral concerns for autism emerge in the second year of life, it is likely that we can identify differences in brain markers in children who develop autism even earlier in development. Therefore, in our "Infant-Sibling Study", we are using a variety of innovative methods, including eye-tracking, electrophysiology (EEG), and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), in addition to behavioral testing, to characterize trajectories of brain function and development in the first year of life. The goals of our ongoing research are to identify sensitive risk markers of ASD as early as possible, as

only with early detection can we initiate early intervention.

Three features of the UCLA Infant-Sibling Study distinguish it from any other high risk infant study of autism. First, we begin to study infants at 6 weeks of age. Second, we combine multiple imaging techniques, such as MRI, EEG and eye tracking, to comprehensively study early brain patterns in infants. Lastly, we directly tie into a cutting-edge study of early intervention led by Dr. Connie Kasari. In this early intervention, coined "Baby JASPER," 12 to 18 months olds demonstrating early red flags for autism are enrolled into an intervention study targeting social communication.

Our outstanding multidisciplinary team includes developmental psychologists,

neuroscientists and clinical neurologists, and we are all dedicated to the goal of identifying early developmental markers of autism that will serve as targets for effective, early intervention. Although we are mid way through this study, we can share some glimpses into the insights we have gained already!

What have we learned so far:

Eye Tracking

Based on our eye tracking data, we have found that by 3 months of age, infants are able to pick up on the abstract representation of animate motions. Infants are looking longer at circles engaged in a "chase" than circles engaged in random motion, suggesting that a preference to look at socially relevant information emerges early in



development regardless of risk for ASD. When presented with more realistic depictions of social interactions in short video clips, infants are showing increases in looking at the faces of characters in *Charlie Brown* and *Sesame Street* from 3 to 12 months of age, showing increased attention span as they develop.

Early brain development

One of the particularly innovating aspects of our research is our commitment to understanding early brain development among infants at high and low risk for ASD. We scan infants during natural sleep at 6 weeks and 9 months of age. fMRI is a completely noninvasive technique that provides detailed information about the organization of the infant brain at rest. So far we have found that by 6 weeks, the brains of high and low risk infants are already organized into distinct functional networks, especially ones involved in processing visual, auditory and sensory information.

In addition, infants are able to process streams of speech during sleep. Moreover, we see that some 6 week old infants show a novelty response to a foreign language they hear in the scanner as indicated by greater response in auditory and language processing regions of the brain. An equally exciting finding is that the amount their brains activate to English speech at 6 weeks is related to later language skills.

EEG & Pattern Learning



A baby in an EEG net.

EEG is a powerful measure of the brain's electrical activity. Through EEG we can measure the brain's response to events in the environment as well as patterns of brain connections during "rest." Through EEG we can learn about cognitive function without having to rely on behavioral measures, as behavioral responses are challenging to gather in infants!

Through EEG, we have been studying statistical learning in our infants. Statistical learning involves the ability for one to detect patterns in the environment. Pattern learning is critical for both language learning and social interaction and, therefore, may serve as a predictor of autism or cognitive delay in our high risk infants.

In our visual statistical learning paradigm, infants are exposed to a continuous stream of shapes presented in a specific pattern. If the infants learn the shape pattern, they

should show a particular EEG response to the individual shapes. Therefore, the brain response serves as a proxy for learning. Our preliminary analyses reveal that, as a group, 3 month old infants do show signs of statistical learning, but that there is variability in the robustness of learning that may relate to later cognitive function.

What are our next steps?

Each of our methods has separately yielded promising and compelling findings. As we continue to collect data, we will combine these measures to help us to identify patterns that best predict autism and developmental delay. As more infants age into the study, we hope to gain a clearer picture of developmental profiles that later lead to an ASD diagnosis, with the goal of intervening and providing services for families sooner.

None of this work would be possible without the generous involvement of the families who participate in our study. It is a continuing and ongoing endeavor to detect reliable markers of ASD within the first year. Although we have already learned much from our research, there is still so much yet to know about early social cognitive development and risk factors that lead to an ASD diagnosis.

We are currently recruiting infants with and without a history of ASD to participant in our study. If you or someone you know is interested in participating in our research, please contact our research coordinator Carolyn Ponting at **CPonting@mednet.ucla.edu**

The Savant Fellowship - New CART Fellow



Rujuta Bhatt, MD - Recipient of Savant Fellowship in Behavioral Child Neurology

Dr. Rujuta Bhatt is a Pediatric Neurologist who has recently joined the UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment family as the first recipient of the Savant Fellowship in Behavioral Child Neurology, under the mentorship of Dr. Shafali Spurling Jeste. This new fellowship, designed to train rising stars in child neurology in the clinical care of children with neurodevelopmental disorders. was established through the generous donation of Don and Elizabeth Savant. After completing a combined BA/MD program at the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Dr. Bhatt completed her residency in pediatrics and child neurology at UCLA Mattel Children's Hospital. Her interest and research in neurodevelopmental disabilities and neurogenetics began in medical school. Dr. Bhatt was awarded a grant from The Child Neurology Foundation and was the recipient of the W.T. Gill Summer Research Fellowship to study brain malformations and cognitive profiles of patients with Neurofibromatosis Type 1 (NF1). Dr. Bhatt

also gained clinical expertise with this population by working in the NF1 Multidisciplinary Clinic at Children's National Medical Center.

Throughout her training, Dr. Bhatt has remained engaged in gaining a better understanding of cognition and development in patients with neurologic disorders. While working at UCLA Medical Center, Dr. Bhatt worked with Dr. Raman Sankar to gain expertise in identifying and studying new treatments for Epileptic Encephalopathies with a goal to improve long term neurodevelopmental outcomes. Dr. Bhatt's current research interests are focused on better evaluating and understanding motor function and how it is related to language development in children with neurodevelopmental disabilities. This includes assessing children at young ages and identifying early interventions that will ensure better long term outcomes in development and cognition. Dr. Bhatt's clinical interests are in neurodevelopmental disorders and neurogenetics. Dr. Bhatt will be seeing patients in the Pediatric Neurology and Developmental Neurogenetics Clinic with a focus on autism, neurodevelopmental disorders, ADHD, and Tics.

In addition, to her clinical and research interests Dr. Bhatt is an active member of the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) and the Child Neurology Society (CNS). Dr. Bhatt was selected as a participant for the Women's Leadership Conference at the 2014 AAN annual meeting and also a

recipient of the AAN Meeting Resident
Award. Dr. Bhatt was also identified as one
of the rising leaders in Neurology and was
one of ten selected members for the AAN
Enhanced Resident Leadership Program.
Dr. Bhatt also has a passion for medical
education and works with the UCLA Medical
Education department, the CNS, and AAN
to improve medical education at UCLA and
nationally.

In her fellowship, Dr. Bhatt will be working under the mentorship of Dr. Jeste to study neurodevelopmental outcomes in infants with Tuberous Sclerosis Complex. With Dr. Jeste, she also will be growing the child neurology clinical services through the UCLA Child and Adult Neurodevelopmental Clinic (CAN) Clinic and the UCLA Developmental Neurogenetics Clinic. She also will continue to see patients through Mattel Children's Hospital in the Division of Child Neurology.

Jeste Lab and the Dup15q Alliance



Shafali Spurling Jeste, MD, Principal Investigator and faculty at UCLA CART

This past July, the Jeste Lab had the tremendous opportunity to bring science to the community through its participation at the national Dup15g Alliance

family conference in Orlando, Florida. Dup15q syndrome is one of the most common genetic variants associated with autism spectrum disorder, and Dr. Shafali Spurling Jeste's group has been studying clinical characteristics of Dup15q syndrome through a grant from the Dup15q Alliance. Children with this syndrome also have an electrophysiological signature that likely relates to their underlying genetic variant, and it could serve as an important diagnostic biomarker. In order to be able to study a larger group of children with dup15g. at the national family conference the Jeste lab collected resting state EEG, administered cognitive assessments, and collected parent reports on more than 25 children with dup15q syndrome. With this dataset, and with similar data collected on children with dup15q syndrome at UCLA over the past year, Dr. Jeste's group can now investigate both clinical and brain based markers of autism and developmental delay in this high-risk group. Their research received national attention through the Simon's Foundation Newsletter (http://sfari. org/).

Despite the extra work required to travel and

set up an EEG system outside of the typical lab setting, conducting research at a family conference proved to be highly rewarding for both the researchers and families at the conference. Dr. Jeste and her team met with and studied children with dup15q syndrome who lives across the United States and around the world and families living outside of major academic centers, or in otherwise underserved areas, received the opportunity to speak with researchers and clinicians, and to participate in research that would otherwise be inaccessible. Dr. Jeste says, "Studying Children with rare disorders that cause autism, such as dup15q syndrome, will pave the way for targeted treatments."

The Jeste Lab would like to thank the Dup15q Alliance for the opportunity to attend the "Stronger Together" family conference, and all the families that have supported their research. The next family conference, in 2017, is scheduled to be held here at UCLA!







Photos from the Dup15q Alliance Family Conference in Orlando, Florida.

Research at CART

Are you interested in participating in a research study?

Research studies advance our knowledge of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), leading to earlier diagnosis and better treatment. Research at CART focuses on a variety of topics surrounding ASD, including early identification of brain and behavioral signs underlying autism and effective treatment and intervention practices for people with ASD.

Participation in research studies is free. When you participate, you will be assisting our researchers develop a better understanding and determine better treatment for ASD.

To learn more about our research projects, including how to enroll, please visit the CART website: www.autism.ucla.edu, contact the study coordinator directly, or call (310) 825-9041.



Studies currently at CART:

AGE RANGE Infants under 6 weeks	STUDY NAME Identifying Early Signs of Autism in High-Risk Infants	CONTACT (310) 825-3478
12 - 21 months	Joint Engagement in Infants at Risk for ASD: Integrating Treatment with Biomarkers	(310) 206-1268
12 - 36 months	Early intervention for infants with Tuberous Sclerosis Complex	(310) 825-8738
3 - 21 years	Autism Genetics and Human Diversity Study	(310) 794-4090
4 - 11 years	Autism Biomarkers for Clinical Trials	(310) 825-0180
5 - 8 years	Adaptive Intervention for minimally verbal children with ASD in the Community	(310) 825-0445
5 - 11 years	EEG biomarkers of language and literacy abilities in minimally verbal children with ASD	(310) 825-0180
5 - 11 years	Treatment with Aripiprazole and Behavior Intervention for Children with Autism who have Low Language Ability	(310) 825-6170
7 - 17 years	Brain Imaging in Children with Autism or Typical Developing Children	(310) 206-4482
8 - 16 years	Treatment with Risperidone for Repetitive Behaviors in Children with Autism	(310) 794-2215
15 - 20 years	Brain Wave Study of Autism Spectrum Disorders	(310) 206-9012
18 - 35 years	Treatment of Social Disability in Young Adults with Autism Children with Autism	(310) 825-6170



"I think research can help us seek the truth."

Fangfang Hong Research Assistant Volunteer with the Autism Genetics and Human Diversity Study

Treatment Services at CART

Read more about research and treatment programs at CART on the CART website: www.autism.ucla.edu.

Currently UCLA offers the following treatment programs and services:

All Ages

Child and Adult Neurodevelopmental Clinic (CAN Clinic)

The UCLA Child and Adults Neurodevelopmental Clinic (CAN Clinic) is our outpatient clinic located at UCLA's Westwood Medical Campus. The CAN Clinic provides a multidisciplinary evaluation and treatment for individuals with suspected disorders of social, cognitive, language, and motor development, including ASD.

The services provided at the CAN Clinic include:

- Evaluation
- Treatments
- · Long-term medical and psychiatric care
- Referrals for genetic testing Contact: 310-794-4008

Developmental Neurogenetics Clinic (DNG Clinic)

The Developmental Neurogenetics Clinic is a multidisciplinary clinic that evaluates and treats children with neurodevelopmental disorders (including autism, global developmental delay or intellectual disability) and a known genetic syndrome or variant. Directed by Dr. Shafali Jeste, a pediatric neurologist, the clinic provides comprehensive evaluations and care for children with complex needs, with the team of specialists including neurology, genetics, psychiatry and psychology. Contact: 310-794-4008

Young Children

Early Childhood Partial Hospitalization Program

The ECPHP is a short-term integrated day treatment program for young children who have been diagnosed with, or may have, autism, developmental disabilities, and behavior disorders. ECPHP is a five-day a week, six-hour a day program. All aspects of the program are fully integrated and coordinated to create an individualized, comprehensive, consistent, interdisciplinary, and therapeutic environment.

Contact: (310) 206-2695

Elementary School & Early Adolescents

Parenting and Children's Friendship Program

The program offers parent-assisted social skills group programs for children in elementary school (beginning at end of 1st grade) who are having problems making and/or keeping friends. We also offer parent training/behavior modification programs for parents with children (starting at age 2) and early adolescents (age 12½-15½)

Contact: (310) 825.0142

Ages 6 - 12

ABC Partial Program

The Achievement, Behavior, Cognition (ABC) Child Programs in the Neuropsychiatric Hospital at UCLA provides psychiatric services through the Partial Hospitalization Program and the Intensive Outpatient Program. ABC Child Programs are time—limited, integrated programs dedicated to assisting children ages 6-12 and their families to promote positive emotional and behavioral health.

Contact: (310) 825-0415

Ages 8-12

Secret Agent Society (SAS)

The Secret Agent Society (SAS) is evidence based social skills intervention program for children ages 8-12. This 10-week program has been validated as an effective program to teach social skills to children who have a variety of social challenges in a school setting.

Contact: (310) 206-2210

Preschool, Teens & Young Adults

Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relationship Skills (PEERS)

PEERS is a manualized, social skills training intervention for adolescents and young adults. It has a strong evidence-base for use with teens and young adults with autism spectrum disorders, but is also appropriate for teens and young adults with ADHD, anxiety, depression, and other socioemotional problems.

Contact: (310) 267-3377

CART in the Community





The Center for Autism Research and
Treatment has been active this year attending community events focused on resources
for families with autism and special needs.
Staff, volunteers, and faculty from UCLA
CART attended the Autism Speaks Walk
Now for Autism event at the Pasadena Rose
Bowl in April 2015. Thousands of people
participated in the 5k walk around the
Pasadena Rose Bowl and visited the
resource fair adjacent to the walk.

CART also participated in two events hosted by the Special Needs Network this year. The resource fairs took place in April and August of and were located at the Jr. Blind of America campus in Windsor Hills. At the Back to School fair in August, over 50 medical and health resource vendors provided families with free medical and dental screening, legal counseling, cooking and exercise demonstrations, and workshops on a wide range of tops from the latest adaptive technology for the classroom to strategies to reduce blood pressure through daily exercise.

CART will continue to support our community partners at upcoming resources fairs around Los Angeles. Come visit us at our booth at future event and learn about the research activities and treatment programs at UCLA CART.

Giving to CART

CART depends greatly on philanthropy to sustain its cutting-edge research, treatment, and education programs now and into the future. The establishment of CART in 2003 marked an exciting advancement, particularly for the new and upcoming generation of autism researchers. Since then, CART has concentrated its efforts on developing strong collaborations across disciplines and making major scientific breakthroughs to clarify the mechanisms underlying autism and related disorders. CART has also led the field in designing



evidence-based treatment interventions. Your support will help CART continue as well as expand its research, treatment, and community outreach activities to improve the lives of countless children and young adults and their families affected by autism spectrum disorders.

Please make your donation by check payable to The UCLA Foundation and specify CART Fund #618040 in the memo line. Mail the check to Alan Han, Director of Development for Neuroscience: UCLA Health Sciences Development, 10945 Le Conte Avenue, Suite 3132, Los Angeles, California 90095-1784.

You may also donate to CART online at https://giving.ucla.edu/CART. If you have more questions about making a gift to CART, please contact: Alan Han, Director of Development for Neuroscience at (310) 825-1546.

Upcoming Events at CART

Autism Affinity Distinguished Lecture Series

UCLA CART offers the distinguished scientific lecture series on the first Friday of each month from October through June. This lecture series brings scientific experts from around the country and internationally to present and discuss multidisciplinary topics of autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The lectures are free and open to the public.

Location:

UCLA Gonda (Goldschmied) Neuroscience & Genetics Research Center

1st Floor Conference Room 695 Charles E. Young Drive South Los Angeles, CA 90095

October 2, 2015

Speaker: Jonathan Sebat, PhD UCSD

Title: Exploring the Other 99% of Variation in the Autism Genome

November 6, 2015

Speaker: Sally Ozonoff, PhDMIND Institute, UC Davis Medical

Title: Advances in Early Detection of Autism Spectrum Disorder

December 4, 2015

Speaker: Kevin Pelphrey, PhD
Yale Child Study Center, Yale University
Title: Towards a Transformative,
Translational Developmental
Neruoscience of Autism

Time:

*Coffee Served: 8:30AM *Lecture: 9:00AM-10:00AM *Questions & Discussion:

10:00AM-10:30AM

January 8, 2016

Speaker: Aubyn Stahmer, PhDMIND Institute, UC Davis Medical
Center

Title: Translational of evidence-based autism practices to the community

February 5, 2016

Speaker: Lonnie Zwaigenbaum, PhD

Autism Research Centre, University of Alberta

Title: Improving care experiences within acute care settings for children with ASD and their families

March 4, 2016

Speaker: Charles Nelson, PhD

Harvard University

Title: Early identification of infants at

risk for autism

More information:

(310) 825-9041

April 1, 2016

Speaker: Mustafa Sahin, MD, PhD

Harvard University

Title: Tuerbous Sclerosis as a Model for Autism

May 6, 2016

Speaker: Thomas Bourgeron, PhD

Institut Pasteur, France

Title: TBD

June 6, 2016

Speaker: Larry Young, PhD

Emory University

Title: Neurobiology of Social

Relationships: Implications for novel

treatments for autism

Free Conference for Community in Community

Autism: More than a Spectrum Supporting Children and Families

Translation services available!

Healthy African American Families (HAAF) and UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment (CART) will host a free conference including community dialogue with presentations and panel discussions on autism, early detection, and treatment.

Please register for this free conference by November 9, 2015. Contact HAAF by telephone at: (323) 292-2002 or on the web at: www.haafii.org

Partners include: UC Davis Mind Istitute; HRSA; University of Rochester; Penn

Thursday, November 19, 2015

8am - 4pm

Holman United Methodist Church 3320 West Adams Blvd Los Angeles, CA 90018



760 Westwood Plaza, Semel 68-225A Los Angeles, CA 90095