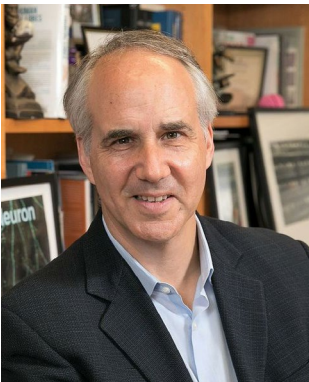




## *UCLA CENTER FOR AUTISM RESEARCH AND TREATMENT (CART)*

### SPRING 2020 E-NEWSLETTER

#### A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



Amid the unprecedented realities that each of us are actively addressing during the COVID-19 global pandemic, we want to first convey our best wishes and let you know that you are in our thoughts.

At CART, our first priority is the health, safety, and well-being of our community. For any clinical matters, please contact our clinics directly:

- Child and Adult Neurodevelopmental (CAN) Clinic at (310) 794-4008
- Care and Research in Neurogenetics Clinic (CARING) Clinic at (310) 206-7404

To learn more about UCLA's ongoing response to this crisis, please visit the [UCLA Health COVID-19 webpage](#) or call a special hotline at (310) 267-3300, during business hours.

Additionally, we have compiled up-to-date resources, approved by leading clinicians and designed to help you stay informed and empowered in regards to COVID-19. [Click here to see the guide.](#)

As you may know, many institutions are closing their research programs temporarily to limit potential transmission of COVID-19. At UCLA, we are putting a temporary pause on our in-person events, including research activities that involve direct patient contact. In the meantime, our work has not stopped. We are continuing to analyze research data that we have already collected, which is keeping us busy!

As we adjust to remote working, I am thrilled to announce a \$15,000 gift from Northwestern Mutual through the efforts of Chau Le and John Klemm, who are great friends and generous supporters of CART's College to Careers program lead by Dr. Amanda Gulsrud and Dr. Elizabeth Laugeson. This program is focused on providing services to young adults in college and entering the workplace. You will find more updates about this program later in this newsletter. I also am excited to introduce our new series, Coffee CART and Sciences and Sandwiches, which bring together parents, caregivers, and community members to join our faculty for informal discussion and conversation, hosted by Dr. Connie Kasari and Dr. Cathy Lord. We hope you will join us when our programming resumes later in the year.

We refer you to our [website](#) for other updates and details about our ongoing research studies, how to participate in research, rescheduled events, and how to support CART. Feel free to reach out to us if you need our help during this difficult time. Again, now more than ever, we rely on your partnership.

Please stay safe and healthy. Our best wishes to you and your family.

Best regards,

Daniel H. Geschwind, M.D., Ph.D.

Gordon and Virginia MacDonald Distinguished Professor of Neurology, Psychiatry, and Human Genetics  
Director, UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment (CART)  
Senior Associate Dean and Associate Vice Chancellor, Precision Health  
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

## HIGHLIGHTS



### **The Infant Brain Imaging Study (IBIS) for Early Prediction of Autism**

Infant siblings of children with autism have a significantly higher likelihood of developing autism compared to the general population. By studying these infant siblings early in development, we have the opportunity to understand how the brain changes in the first year of life, prior to the emergence of autism symptoms and, by doing so, identify early markers that could improve the timing of intervention. For over a decade, a national study called The Infant Brain Imaging Study (IBIS) has used MRI to study early brain

development in infant siblings. The IBIS investigators have found that changes detected by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in the first year do predict autism. To learn more about this discovery, [click here](#).



### **Thank You Families for CART-Wheeling with UCLA Gymnastics**

In February 2020, UCLA CART partnered with UCLA Gymnastics to host an engaging event dedicated to our CART families and families of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) throughout Los Angeles. Families enjoyed food and games in UCLA's premier Pauley Pavilion Club. Games ranged from ring toss to giant Jenga to an interactive face-painting station. Both individuals with

autism and typically developing individuals of all ages participated in these inclusively designed activities. Families mingled with CART staff, researchers, and clinicians, and learned about CART's wide-ranging programs. After the reception, families were invited into the historic Pauley Pavilion to watch the 7-time National Championship-winning UCLA Gymnastics team. The Bruins came out on top of the Arizona Wildcats, which made for a rewarding finish to an already exceptional day.

For those in attendance, thank you for coming out to enjoy our event! Please be on the lookout for future CART family appreciation events. We would love to have you join us.

## FACULTY RESEARCH



*Dr. Connie Kasari*



*Dr. Catherine Lord*

### **Dr. Connie Kasari and Dr. Catherine Lord Awarded New Grants to Study Treatment for Minimally Verbal Children with ASD and to Examine Language and Social Communication Skills for Children with ASD**

Dr. Connie Kasari and Dr. Catherine Lord have been awarded two new grants: Boosting Language Outcomes of Minimally Verbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (BLOOM) and Supported Play Research Outcomes Understanding Treatments (SPROUT).

BLOOM, funded by the National Institutes of Health, aims to further understanding of speech heterogeneity within autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and to inform intervention in order to develop more effective and personalized treatment. Researchers will investigate the effects of supplementing an evidence-based joint attention intervention (JASPER) with a motor-sound system intervention (PROMPT) compared to receiving only JASPER. These effects will be measured in terms of speech and language outcomes in participating children.

SPROUT, funded by the Simons Foundation, aims to promote language and social communication skills for children with ASD, while further substantiating two recently developed treatment outcome measures: the ELSA (Elicitation of Language Samples for Analysis) and the BOSCC (Brief Observation of Social Communication Change). This multisite study includes research teams from UCLA, Weill Cornell, and Boston University.

To learn more about these groundbreaking studies, [click here](#).



### Helping Young Adults with Autism Achieve Employment

Many adults on the autism spectrum struggle to achieve employment, despite having many strengths and unique skillsets to bring to the workforce. The UCLA CART's College to Careers program, led by Drs. Amanda Gulsrud and Elizabeth Laugeson, is focused on providing services to young adults in college and entering the workplace. Dr. Amanda Gulsrud has been awarded the Autism Speaks Transition to Adulthood Research Grant, which is being utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of a

novel program to address these challenges. The intervention will include an adapted version of the UCLA PEERS® program, in the format of a 20-week PEERS® for Careers class focused on the social skills needed to obtain and maintain employment (e.g., building a resume, interviewing skills, and conflict resolution in the workplace). The 20-week class will be followed by a 10-week internship through organizations partnering with the program. To learn more about this innovative study and participant eligibility, please [click here](#).



Dr. James McCracken

### Two New Studies from Dr. James McCracken are Examining Medication

The McCracken Lab at UCLA CART recently started enrolling participants for two new research studies. The Long-Term Antipsychotic Pediatric Safety Trial (LAPS) is a 26-month study to examine the long-term effects of individuals who are taking Risperidone or Aripiprazole. This study is for individuals between 3 and 17 years old who are currently taking Risperidone or Aripiprazole, and have a parent or designated support person available.

The McCracken Lab also is recruiting participants for an exciting opportunity for families to receive the PEERS® social skills intervention through the UCLA PEERS® Clinic for free (normally costing more than \$3,300) as part of a research study examining the combined effects of PEERS® with a medication called L-DOPA.

To learn more about these opportunities and to determine if your teen may be eligible to participate, please [click here](#).



Dr. Catherine Lord

### **Work, Living, and Pursuit of Happiness: Examining the Current Outcomes of Autistic Adults**

In a sample of more than 200 children who have been followed since they were around 2 years old, most of whom were diagnosed with autism at that time, Dr. Catherine Lord and her research team have tracked autism symptoms, cognitive abilities, behavioral and emotional challenges, quality of life, and activities as these children have grown up. Now that the participants in this sample are approaching age 30, the team is interested in examining what they are doing in adulthood, how much independence they have, and what factors, from early and later in development, predict their engagement in work, independent living, friendships, and levels of challenges. To learn more about these findings, [click here](#).

## **CLINICAL SERVICES**



Dr. Caroline Grantz

### **Introducing Young Adults with Autism: Independence and Mental Health (AAIM) Group at the UCLA CAN Clinic**

The Young Adults with Autism: Independence and Mental Health (AAIM) Group will start at the UCLA Child and Adult Neurodevelopmental (CAN) Clinic. AAIM is a 12-week education and support group for young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The group will focus on the challenges young adults with ASD who identify as male may face, including anxiety, depression, and building independence. Facilitated by the CAN clinic trainees and supervised by licensed clinical psychologist Dr. Caroline Grantz, this group is designed to both inform and provide strategies around difficulties that may arise from being a young adult with ASD. If interested, please contact us at (310) 794-4008 or [clinic@autism.ucla.edu](mailto:clinic@autism.ucla.edu). Some insurance plans are accepted for this service. Telehealth appointments may be available.

## **WANT TO SUPPORT LEADING-EDGE RESEARCH AND COMPASSIONATE PATIENT CARE AT THE UCLA CENTER FOR AUTISM RESEARCH & TREATMENT? QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?**

Please contact Lauren Bayans at (310) 794-3913 or [lbyans@support.ucla.edu](mailto:lbyans@support.ucla.edu)

### **UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment**

[www.autism.ucla.edu](http://www.autism.ucla.edu) • (310) 825-9041

If you do not wish to receive further information from UCLA CART, please either call us (310) 825-9041 or email us at [info@autism.ucla.edu](mailto:info@autism.ucla.edu).