

A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



Dear Friends:

I hope you and your families are well. As the pandemic seems to be lifting at least locally, I thought it opportune to share positive happenings at CART, so as to add to some of the cautious optimism around some return to normalcy that thankfully seems to be spreading in our neck of the woods. One aspect of the reemergence that is particularly salient to me is the realization of how important even our most banal routines can be in our daily life and how the pandemic's disruption of these routines can lead to unease and distress. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to reassess what we may have taken for granted and embrace adaptive changes in our lives. One aspect of this relevant to clinical services at CART has been a shift to Telehealth and all of the adaptations that this has required for practitioners and our community. I bring your attention to the [COVID resources](#) that we have compiled on our website since last winter.

The pandemic also put a wrench in many of our research projects involving direct patient interaction, since all but the most necessary in person visits for clinical care were curtailed for many months. Fortunately, National Institutes of Health (NIH), which helps fund some of our research, allowed us to continue to keep our staff and trainees on our payroll, since retraining new researchers would cost far more and likely delay projects even further. However, this means that we may need additional research support to ensure that we reach our goals -- we continue to work with our supporters and NIH to meet these needs.

At the same time, we are excited to have several junior faculty whose programs we are working to develop, as we continue to build and expand the work force in this area and grow CART researchers for the next generation. This includes continuing to build our capacity in biomarker discovery, in the comprehensive study of motor function in autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as our [CARING Clinic](#), which focuses on those with rare genetic disorders associated with ASD and developmental delay. Please stay tuned as we hope to feature these faculty in future newsletters.

The pandemic seemed also to coincide with and perhaps initially give us more space to become more involved with important social justice and anti-racism movements, which we at CART have embraced as part of our fabric ([click here to read CART's statement of commitment to anti-racism](#)). Please contact us and continue to visit our website to stay abreast of these developments or get more involved.

As always, we would love to hear from you -- please contact me with any questions or messages for CART.

My best wishes to you and your families during what has been (hopefully) the most challenging period that we have faced together as a society.

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

College to Career Addresses a Critical Need for Young Adults with ASD



There will be an estimated 700,000 adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) aging into adulthood over the next 10 years. Yet, a staggering 80% of adults with ASD are unemployed. ASD is the fastest growing neurodevelopmental disorder in the United States affecting approximately one in 54 children (Center for Disease Control). More is needed to meet the needs of this growing population, including service expansion, additional mental health services, and increased transitions services. Learn more about the UCLA College to Career program and how to support this necessary program.

[Donate today](#)

In Conversation with Dr. Connie Kasari



Dr. Connie Kasari is a professor of Psychiatry at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and a leading international expert in developing interventions for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families. Her research focuses on targeted interventions for early social communication development in at-risk infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with autism, and peer relationships for school-aged children with autism, leading to the recognition of her therapy JASPER as an established evidence-based ASD treatment.

[Read more >](#)

Ask the Expert



Dr. Amanda Gulsrud is the HS Associate Professor in the Division of Child and Adult Psychiatry and director of the UCLA Child and Adult Neurodevelopmental Clinic at UCLA. She is a licensed clinical psychologist who specializes in autism and the development of early interventions. She answers a few of your questions and shares some tips about how to handle COVID-19 topics with your child.

[Read more >](#)

RESEARCH UPDATES

Brain and Body in Motion: The importance of motor function in autism



Dr. Rujuta Wilson is a behavioral child neurologist and faculty member at the UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment, Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, and the Department of Pediatrics. Dr. Wilson's lab (the Wilson Motor Phenotyping Lab) studies motor development in individuals with autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions, with the goal of understanding how atypical motor development can impact cognition, social communication, and physical health. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Wilson and her team were determined to make research safe and accessible to the families we care for at CART and Semel.

[Read more >](#)

'Brain' organoids grown in lab mature much like infant brains



A new study from UCLA and Stanford University researchers finds that three-dimensional human stem cell-derived brain organoids can mature in a manner that is strikingly similar to human brain development.

[Read more >](#)

Sensory, Cognitive, and Affective Neurodevelopment (SCAN) Lab combines brain imaging, measures of peripheral arousal to examine atypical sensory processing



Dr. Shulamite Green's Sensory, Cognitive, and Affective Neurodevelopment (SCAN) Lab combines brain imaging, measures of peripheral arousal like heart rate, and behavior to examine atypical sensory processing in different groups of children and adolescents. We particularly focus on sensory over-responsivity, which is characterized as a heightened, atypical response to some sensory stimuli, affects multiple clinical groups and can greatly impact how people processes their social environment and function in daily life.

[Read more >](#)

Unique Opportunity: UCLA CART Treatment Study targeting Social Skills in Teens and Young Adults with Autism



Social and communication skills have been linked to levels of happiness, self-esteem, and quality of life (Moody and Laugeson 2020). A defining characteristic of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is an overall challenge with social communication, which may begin from a young age and can follow individuals through adolescence and adulthood. For those with ASD, improvements in social skills and social communication have been demonstrated through social skills training, which often includes behavioral rehearsals, modeling, and social reinforcement through praise and other positive feedback (Hall et al. 2018).

[Read more >](#)

Study examines adult quality of life, participation in employment, and trajectories of self-care skills and psychopathology across the lifespan



Recently published work from the Lord Lab has examined the adult outcomes of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities. Using longitudinal data collected over nearly thirty years, these studies examined adult quality of life, participation in employment and other community activities, and trajectories of self-care skills and psychopathology (i.e., depression, anxiety, and ADHD symptoms) across the lifespan.

[Read more >](#)

CLINICAL UPDATES

KidsConnect Maintains High Quality Treatment and Dissemination through COVID



It has been a year of unprecedented new realities. We know that the entirety of our community has had to adjust to a "new normal." In March 2020, KidsConnect faced significant challenges as the reality of COVID limitations became apparent. How on earth could we continue to provide effective treatment for young children with autism in a safe manner? We closed the clinic for 4 days, restructured, innovated and quickly came up with a viable plan using a combination of in-person and remote therapy. We reopened and have been treating children in-person since then with success and safety.

[Read more >](#)