Autism Experts Form Research and Advocacy Consortium

First project to study access to medical and dental care in the adult population in Rhode Island

EAST PROVIDENCE – Dozens of autism experts across a variety of specialties have joined together to form the Rhode Island Consortium for Autism Research and Treatment (RI-CART). The consortium will bring together researchers, physicians, scientists, service providers, educators and parents to collaborate on a broad range of research, education and advocacy projects.

“This is such an important step for Rhode Island when you consider that one in 88 children in the U.S. is diagnosed with autism and more than one million children in the country are directly affected by autism,” said THOMAS ANDERS, MD, a senior consultant for the project. “By establishing this unique model of collaboration, Rhode Island is demonstrating its commitment to tackling integrated scientific research on autism and autism spectrum disorders.”

The RI-CART group is made up of the state’s leading experts on autism research, education, health and advocacy. Organizations represented include Bradley Hospital, Rhode Island Hospital, Women & Infants Hospital, Butler Hospital, Memorial Hospital, Brown University and the Alpert Medical School, the Brown Institute for Brain Science, the Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute, Gateway Healthcare, Rhode Island College, University of Rhode Island, The Autism Project, the Groden Network, The NeuroDevelopment Center, Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project, the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Rhode Island Department of Health, Office of Special Needs.

Key objectives include:
• Supporting basic, clinical and behavioral research across disciplines and institutions
• Creating a research infrastructure, including a statewide web-based research registry.
• Improving and expanding diagnostic and treatment methods.
• Informing state and federal policymakers about autism spectrum disorders.

“Collaborative, multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional teams such as RI-CART can be difficult to build, yet are essential for tackling important problems posed by autism,” said ERIC MORROW, MD, PhD, assistant professor at Brown University, co-director of the RI-CART Research Committee and an autism genetics researcher at Bradley Hospital. “The spirit has been there for several years, but it took initial seed funding from several Rhode Island institutions to accelerate the efforts. The Brown Institute for Brain Science, the Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute, Bradley Hospital, Women & Infants Hospital and the Groden Network, all invested seed funds in the project late in 2012, which enabled us to reach the point we are at today.”

Primary care study

The first project to be launched by RI-CART is a $53,000 Rhode Island Foundation grant to study primary care for those with autism. A team will assess 150 adolescents and adults with autism to determine the full spectrum of their primary health care needs (medical, dental, and vision), as well as barriers or obstacles to obtaining primary care. This research project will be Rhode Island’s first examination of the health needs of those with autism spectrum disorders.

“This is a population with more medical and specialty care needs than the average population, so we want to figure out how to streamline the process, so families don’t have to struggle to receive the care they need for their loved ones,” said HENRY SACHS, MD, chief medical officer of Bradley Hospital and the study’s primary investigator. “The comprehensive report and recommendations from this study will hopefully lead to more effective options for care for Rhode Islanders with autism in the near future.”

Dr. Henry Sachs discussing the research project

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