


A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



Dear Friends:

Spring is a time of transformation and reawakening, and a time to consider how we've grown and where we are headed. This feels especially relevant after a year in which we have wrestled with so much loss and change, including the ever-evolving landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic, and now the ongoing war in Ukraine. As a father, I understand the difficulties these current events can present as kids are bound to have questions. I refer you to an article presented by UCLA Health on ["How to talk to children about war in Ukraine."](#) [CART's COVID-19 resource page](#) also offers information for you and your family as we continue to navigate this pandemic.

As spring emerges and the pandemic hopefully will wane, I am thankful for UCLA's ability to navigate the twists and turns. UCLA continues to maintain strong safety protocols and a collective commitment to public health. Although we began the new year with a temporary switch to remote instructions, students, faculty, and staff have returned back into the classroom and on campus. UCLA's clinical and research programs continue to operate in either in-person, virtual, or even hybrid formats, allowing many more individuals greater flexibility in accessing and participating in programs and services at UCLA and at CART.

I'd like to highlight several bright spots. I welcome back to UCLA our new CART faculty member, Dr. Lucina Uddin. Dr. Uddin trained at UCLA, receiving her PhD in cognitive neuroscience, completed her postdoctoral fellowship at the Child Study Center at New York University, and became a faculty member in Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University School of Medicine. Her research at UCLA combines functional and structural neuroimaging data to examine the organization of large-scale brain networks supporting social cognition and executive function. You can read more about Dr. Uddin later in this newsletter.

During April's Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month, CART celebrated the important role autistic individuals play in our lives and our communities across the country and around the world. At our annual scientific symposium, *Advances in Autism 2022* held on April 29th, CART faculty and guest speakers presented updates on autism research and treatment. Some of the topics explored included autism biomarker development to improve clinical research, the next generation of autism intervention science, advances in the genetics of autism, and how to support autistic people in uncertain times, to name a few. We will post the talks and discussion to the [CART YouTube](#) page shortly.

I am also excited to share updates on CART's newly establish J.E.D.I. Scholarship Fund. J.E.D.I. is the acronym for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. CART has established the J.E.D.I. Scholarship Fund to help support members of the BIPOC community attend *Advances in Autism 2022*. This year, CART was able to offer 12 scholarships! With your support, we can continue to grow this program. If you would like to learn more about how you can impact CART and help sustain programs like the J.E.D.I. Scholarship Fund, please contact: Christopher Carbado, Director of Development for UCLA Health Sciences at: ccarbado@mednet.ucla.edu or 310-562-6498.


As always, we would love to hear from you – please contact me with any questions or messages for CART. I wish you all a restorative and healthy spring.

Best regards,

Daniel H. Geschwind, MD, PhD
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


Introducing Dr. Lucina Uddin



Dr. Lucina Uddin is one of CART's newest faculty members. Fifteen years after receiving a Ph.D. from the UCLA Psychology Department, she returned to the campus this past fall. Dr. Uddin completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Child Study Center at New York University, then worked as a faculty member in Psychiatry & Behavioral Science at Stanford University. She next directed the Cognitive and Behavioral Neuroscience program in the Psychology Department at the University of Miami until her recent move back to UCLA, where she currently directs the [Brain Connectivity and Cognition Laboratory](#).

[Read more >](#)


New Book Presents Groundbreaking JASPER Intervention



The JASPER Clinician's Manual is available now! JASPER (Joint Attention, Symbolic Play, Engagement, and Regulation) is a treatment approach based on a combination of developmental and behavioral principles developed by Dr. Connie Kasari at UCLA. It targets the foundations of social communication (joint attention, imitation, play) and uses naturalistic strategies to increase the rate and complexity of social communication. It can be implemented by parents, teachers, clinicians, paraprofessionals, and other related service providers. The intervention works well in conjunction with other behavioral-based therapies and can be naturally incorporated into inclusion and special education classrooms and every day activities in the home. The only required materials are developmentally-appropriate toys or activities.

[Read more >](#)

UCLA College to Career Plans to Increase Employer Awareness and Knowledge of Autistic Individuals' Strengths in the workplace




There will be an estimated 700,000 autistic adults aging into adulthood over the next 10 years. Yet, a staggering 80% of autistic adults are unemployed. UCLA College to Career was developed to address the challenges faced by autistic young adults in their transition from college to career.

From an initial meeting in 2014 between UCLA researchers and staff and our founding supporters Chau Le and John Klemm, an idea was discussed on how UCLA could create an environment to better support autistic young adults moving from college into their professional lives. What emerged from these discussions was an innovative set of initiatives developed by UCLA's Dr. Elizabeth Laugeson and Dr. Amanda Gulsrud, to provide training and support undergraduate and graduate autistic students as they pursue and enter the workforce. College to Career is creating a scalable solution to employment barriers faced by autistic individuals to serve as a model of higher education training for colleges across the country.

[Read more >](#)

RESEARCH UPDATES


SPARK Aims to Speed Up Research and Advance our Understanding of Autism



SPARK stands for "Simons Foundation Powering Autism Research for Knowledge" and the mission of this study is simple; it is to speed up research and advance our understanding of autism to help improve lives. Launched in 2016, SPARK is the largest autism research study of its kind with 17 of the nation's leading medical schools and autism research centers to help recruit individuals and families affected by autism. CART, under Dr. Amanda Gulsrud, has been with SPARK for the past 6 years being leaders in advancing the science of autism. You can join today by visiting: <https://sparkforautism.org/?code=ucla>. Check out updates from SPARK Central and learn more about autism.

[Read more >](#)


Examining Sensory Over-Responsivity in Autism



Why do people respond differently to their surroundings? Does your child dislike the feeling of wool fabric, but their sibling cannot help but constantly touch it? Have you attended a concert where you loved staring at flashing lights, but your friend averted their eyes? Our lab aims to understand why we all react to sensory stimuli so differently! The Sensory Cognitive and Affective Neurodevelopment (SCAN) Lab, directed by Dr. Shulamite Green, is currently recruiting for two studies focused on examining sensory over-responsivity in autism.

[Read more >](#)

Join a UCLA CART Focus Group for Black/African American and LatinX Parents and Caregivers to Help Make Autism Research More Meaningful



E.D.I. stands for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Although UCLA CART investigators have dedicated substantial efforts to working with under-represented groups in their research and treatment programs, such as our work in genetics and developing community-based treatment programs, we recognize that we still have a long way to go to achieve our goals to minimize disparities in autism research and treatment. UCLA CART is dedicated to making our research better and to be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive. UCLA CART is establishing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Focus Groups for Black/African American and LatinX parents and caregivers.

[Read more >](#)