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## **The Center for Autism & Neurodevelopmental Disorders Receives \$1.7 Million Grant for Dental Care Research for Children**

**SANTA ANA, Calif. – August 10, 2015** – Supported by a \$1.7 million grant from the national Autism Treatment Network, The Center for Autism & Neurodevelopmental Disorders will research ways to improve the pervasively poor dental and oral health of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

At rates far surpassing their peers, children with ASD in Orange County and elsewhere routinely experience serious dental and oral health issues, including excessive plaque, tooth decay and oral infections. The majority of the problems stem from a lack of healthful dental and oral routines at home, combined with often inadequate or infrequent access to professional dental and oral health practitioners.

The Autism Treatment Network, which awarded the grant, is a national collaborative of physicians, researchers, clinicians, children's hospitals and academic institutions that provides state-of-the-art autism-related information, services and support. The grant is part of a larger national autism research initiative – overseen by the federal Health Services Research Administration (HSRA) – known as Autism Intervention Research Network for Physical Health, or AIR-P.

### ***Research is Part of a Nationwide Initiative***

The Center for Autism & Neurodevelopment Disorders is one of 14 autism research programs across the nation chosen for AIR-P funding through the Autism Treatment Network; others include Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, Vanderbilt University Medical Center and St. Louis University School of Medicine. Collectively, this ASD-focused research in improving dental and oral health care is titled, *Improving Participation in Dental Care and Oral Health Outcomes for Underserved Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*.

The Center will partner in its research efforts with Nationwide Children's, an international leader in pediatric health care and research based in Columbus, Ohio. Additionally, Healthy Smiles, a non-profit Orange County organization that provides comprehensive dental services to underserved children and families, will assist The Center by providing dental exams and participating in study meetings, among other research-related activities.



### ***Multiple Challenges Confront Children with ASD***

Multiple factors prevent children with ASD from practicing and receiving effective dental and oral health care, according to Catherine Brock, M.A., executive director of The Center for Autism & Neurodevelopment Disorders. These include challenges arising from autism-related symptoms such as maladaptive behaviors, language delays and sensory sensitivities.

“Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder face many barriers in accessing health care, including lack of providers with the training and experience necessary to identify and assess conditions appropriately on their behalf,” Brock explained. Meanwhile, families with low socioeconomic status and those from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds often face additional barriers and are at increased risk for poor oral health, she said.

### ***Researchers to Conduct Randomized Clinical Trials***

Researchers at The Center will compare behavioral strategies to improve dental hygiene and compliance through randomized clinical trials to significantly improve the long-term physical health for children, particularly in underserved communities.

“With this generous research grant from the Autism Treatment Network, our goal is to help educate and provide resources for families and dentists as we work together to remove barriers that impede daily hygiene and participation in routine dental examinations,” said Robin Steinberg-Epstein, M.D., principal investigator at The Center for Autism & Neurodevelopment Disorders.

The current proposal will apply multi-disciplinary, evidence-based approaches to address health disparities and improve dental outcomes for underserved children with ASD by identifying and removing barriers that impede at-home daily hygiene practices and participation in routine dental exams. The grant from the Autism Treatment Network supports the Dental Care and Oral Health Outcomes program, a national effort that seeks to bring together patients, families, clinicians and researchers to improve health outcomes, usher in dental and oral health care innovations and improve care for children with ASD.

For more information, please visit [www.thecenter4autism.org](http://www.thecenter4autism.org).

### **About The Center for Autism & Neurodevelopmental Disorders**

Originally founded in 2001 (as For OC Kids), The Center is home to a team of experts in the field of autism and neurodevelopmental disorders. Since its opening, The Center has been a leader in clinical services, research, education, and outreach, serving clients birth through 22 years old.



**THE CENTER FOR AUTISM  
& NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS**

In late 2012, a catalytic investment by the Thompson Family Foundation and the Children and Families Commission of Orange County provided \$14.8 million to expand The Center for Autism & Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

The Center aims to provide help and hope to children, adolescents, young adults and their families challenged by autism spectrum and other neurodevelopmental disorders through excellent clinical care, innovative research, quality education, and community engagement. For more information, please visit [www.thecenter4autism.org](http://www.thecenter4autism.org).

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