Recent Advances in the Identification and Early Diagnosis of Autism

June 6th – 7th, 2012

The Gonda Brain Research Center
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Dr. Karen Pierce
Screening, Identifying, and Studying Autism Early
During the first portion of the workshop Dr. Karen Pierce will review commonly used early screening tools, and conceptual issues related to conducting large-scale early screening studies. Next, Dr. Pierce will review a battery of novel experimental paradigms used at the UCSD ACE to identify early markers of autism with a special emphasis on the utility of patterns of eye gaze as determined by eye tracking. The workshop will conclude with discussion regarding the future of the early identification, diagnosis, and treatment of autism.

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 Workshop – Prof. Eric Courchesne
Discussion of Research on Brain and Genetic Defects in Autism: Biomarkers, Treatment, Heterogeneity, On-Going Neuropathology and Stem Cell and Animal Model Studies
Dr. Courchesne will conduct an open question and answer workshop that examines research on the brain and genetic defects of autism and on how such knowledge guides research into what causes autism, why there is brain and behavior heterogeneity in autism, how findings may lead to early biomarkers of diagnosis, prognosis and treatment responsiveness, how the brain changes with development and aging, why autism appears to be a progressive neuropathology, and how such new knowledge could better guide stem cell and animal model studies.

13:00 End
Opening & Greetings
Dr. Barbara Brodsky
President of the Bar-Ilan University
Opening remarks and introduction of honorees.
Lecture: Examining Early Behavioral and Brain Development in Autism
Karen Pierce, Ph.D.
Karen Pierce, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Neurosciences at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and the Assistant Director of the UCSD Autism Center of Excellence. Dr. Pierce has been in the field of autism research for 20 years and is an invited speaker both nationally and internationally on the topic of autism. She has published dozens of autism research articles spanning a wide range of topics from behavioral treatment to functional brain imaging. Her work has been highlighted by media and honored by several awards including the San Diego Health Care Champion Award.
Lecture: Developmental NeuroDefects in the First Years of Life in Autism: From MRI to Neurons and Genes
Eric Courchesne, Ph.D.
Eric Courchesne is a Professor of Neurosciences in the School of Medicine at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) and the Director of the UCSD Autism Center of Excellence. He is a leading expert on brain structural and functional abnormalities in autism. His research aims to identify bio behavioral markers of autism that allow for earlier diagnosis and treatment. His MRI studies identified structures that are abnormal at infancy in autism and elucidated patterns of abnormal growth from infancy through adulthood. Dr. Courchesne's studies have resulted in over 180 publications with an overall impact factor that is one of the highest among autism researchers.
Lecture: Examining Early Behavioral and Brain Development in Autism
Dr. Lina Basel-Vanagaite, MD, Ph.D.
Dr. Lina Basel-Vanagaite is the Head of Pediatric Genetics at the Schneider Children's Medical Center of Israel. She has identified 10 new disease-causing genes including genes responsible for nonsyndromic and syndromic intellectual disability. Following identification of the mutation responsible for one specific type of nonsyndromic intellectual disability, preventive genetic screening has been implemented by Dr. Basel-Vanagaite in the at-risk population.
Ayelet Siman Tov, Ph.D.
Ayelet Siman Tov specializes in the field of family and autism, which is her main research interest. She was awarded the Rector's prize for excellent research students for her distinction in her doctoral studies at Bar-Ilan University. She also received a certificate of merit as an excellent lecturer from the Kibbutzim College of Education where she teaches. Dr. Siman Tov is a researcher, lecturer, mentor and academic director in the training program of the Mifne School for therapists of Bar-Ilan University.

The lecture relates to research that investigated the effective adjustment of parents to children with autism. The research population included 176 parents of children, who were diagnosed with autism in an age range of 6-16 years. The studied variables were focused on stress, coherence, locus of control, social support, mental health, quality of marriage and examination of compliance with the diagnosis of autism. The core of the parents' assimilation process apparently revolves on their sense of control that impacts the above variables.