

**Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (IACC) Meeting about the IACC  
Strategic Plan for Autism Spectrum Disorder Research**

AOTA's Research Director attended the Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (IACC) meeting. The meeting was convened by Dr. Thomas Insel, the Director of the National Institute of Mental Health and Chair of the IACC, on January 19, 2010, at the National Institutes of Health Conference Center. Discussing the increased **prevalence** of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Dr. Catherine Rice, from the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at the Centers of Disease Control, reported that **1 in 110 children** (at age 8) is diagnosed with ASD, which is a 57% increase from 2002. Boys continue to be diagnosed more frequently (1 in 70) compared to girls (1 in 315). White, non-Hispanic children showed the highest prevalence rate (1 in 100). The causes of ASD continues to be a mystery, although most agree that it is a combination of genetics and environment.

One alarming finding is that the **average age of ASD diagnosis is 4 years, 6 months**. This news is particularly unsettling in light of the fact that 70-95% of those diagnosed had documented developmental concerns before 2 years of age. Clearly, screening and evaluation for ASD needs to be improved and conducted earlier for children who are at-risk or showing developmental concerns. This is a **prime role and opportunity for occupational therapy practitioners** to assist in earlier identification of children at-risk because of our knowledge of development, keen observational skills, and holistic view of

functioning. Although practitioners cannot diagnose, they can refer the parents or caregivers to health professionals to further evaluate the child.

Dr. Linda Birnbaum, Director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sections, reported findings from the Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Centers, including the University of California at Davis Children's Center. Not only have researchers found biochemical differences between children with ASD and typically developing controls, but also they discovered that children with ASD have **different sleep patterns**, which may be of particular interest to occupational therapy practitioners and parents.

Other speakers included: Dr. Andy Shih, Vice-President of Scientific Affairs for Autism Speaks who presented about autism in different countries, and Dr. Andrew Feinberg, of John Hopkins University School of Medicine Institute of Genetic Medicine, who explained his research on epigenetics and autism.

New research was also described briefly during the meeting. For example, the journal, *Pediatrics*, recently published the first double-blind randomized controlled trial on toddlers with ASD and found that the group who received Early Stage Denver Model (ABA modified) intervention showed a **17 point increase in IQ** and significant improvements in **adaptive behavior**.

For more information, visit

<http://iacc.hhs.gov/events/>

[www.cdc.gov/autism](http://www.cdc.gov/autism)

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