



26 April 2018

Letter from the Director



Courtesy: James Cridland

A number of research papers have come out in the past few months that help refine our thinking about the [genetics](#) and [neuroanatomy](#) of autism. While impressive, they reflect findings from a relatively small number of brains. They do suggest, however, that fundamental findings about the causes of autism can be made if there is adequate postmortem tissue available to analyze.

Autism BrainNet would like to develop new and innovative techniques to reach the 3.5 million families in the US that are affected by autism about the importance of considering postmortem brain tissue donation. What strategies do you think would be most successful and valuable? Please send suggestions to info@autismbrainnet.org or to me personally at dgamaral@ucdavis.edu.

Read the full director's letter [here](#).

WEBINAR

Q&A with Dr. Thomas Avino

Autism BrainNet hosted a live Q&A webinar with Dr. Thomas Avino of the UC Davis MIND Institute on April 9.

During the webinar, Dr. Avino highlighted findings from postmortem brain research on amygdala changes that occur over time in the autism brain. The open access research was published in *PNAS*, which can be read [here](#). Webinar participants asked a number of thoughtful questions on what the findings mean and how they can be applied.



Courtesy: Thomas Avino, PhD

Please go [here](#) to watch a recording of the webinar on YouTube.

SCIENCE

IAN Article Explains DNA Methylation



Courtesy: Fat Camera / Getty Images

The Interactive Autism Network (IAN) published an informative article on DNA methylation on April 10, highlighting how Autism BrainNet resources can help scientists better understand this process in the autism brain.

By adding molecules known as methyl groups, methylation turns specific gene activity on or off. Methylation can affect the shape and function of brain cells with age and after learning, and it is affected by various environmental factors. There is a need for better understanding of methylation in the autism brain.

You can read the article [here](#).

RESEARCH

Autism BrainNet in Brain Banking Volume of the Handbook of Clinical Neurology

Chapter 3

Autism BrainNet

A network of postmortem brain banks established to facilitate autism research

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Volume 150 of the *Handbook of Clinical Neurology* devoted its chapters to brain banking. The volume provides wide coverage of the valuable work done by and challenging issues faced by brain banks around the globe. The chapter on Autism BrainNet discusses the efforts of its nodes to create a consolidated pool of tissue that is distributed to qualified

investigators worldwide to carry out autism research and the challenges that comes with these efforts. The chapter can be found [here](#).

BRAIN AWARENESS WEEK

Autism BrainNet Celebrated Brain Awareness Week



Organized by The Dana Foundation, Brain Awareness Week is the global campaign to increase public awareness of the progress and benefits of brain research. Each March, organizers arrange open neuroscience lab visits, brain exhibits and lectures, and community and classroom science workshops. This year, Autism BrainNet participated by teaching New York City students about neuroanatomy through brain clay models at the Mount Sinai Brain Fair in the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, an Autism BrainNet node. A few events occur after Brain Awareness Week, too! Find one near you [here](#).

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Autism BrainNet at Autism Speaks Walks



Autism Speaks kicked-off their 2018 walks on March 4 at Meyer Amphitheatre in West Palm Beach, Florida, where Autism BrainNet met many wonderful autism families. One autism family—the Teppers—helped Autism BrainNet explain the value of brain tissue research for autism to walkers. Dr. Alycia Halladay enjoyed engaging with walkers at History Park in San Jose, California on April 14. Autism BrainNet will be present at upcoming walks in New Jersey, Los Angeles, and Denver—stop by and say hello. Please go [here](#) to find a walk near you.



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