

Greetings from the Department Chair



Dr. Doug Ziedonis

Welcome to our first issue of *IMPACT*—the Newsletter of the UMass Department of Psychiatry. We are sending you information about new clinical programs, educational events, and our cutting-edge research that is making an impact on better understanding and treating mental illness.

This first issue focuses on Autism and related disorders. Dr. Jean Frazier is one of the nation's leaders as researcher, clinician, and educator on this topic. We thank the Siff family who continues to generously support our new research efforts through their own tireless advocacy and reaching out to other families.

The Newsletter will also give you information on public lectures and other learning opportunities that you or your family might be interested to attend. For example, our next **Be Mentally Well** evening program is about bullying, a serious social concern that has had a negative influence on some children and adolescents.

I encourage you to visit our website (www.umassmed.edu/psychiatry) to learn more about our impact on depression, addiction, anxiety disorders, trauma, and wellness. We strive to help individuals and families to reconnect and feel empowered in recovery. Our outstanding clinicians, researchers, educators, and staff are dedicated to our public mission and to serving our community. With cutting edge technologies in brain imaging and genetics, we are uncovering the causes of these illnesses which will lead to new treatments and possibly cures.

We look forward to sharing with you, through our quarterly newsletter, our discoveries and new and innovative services.

Warm regards,

Douglas M. Ziedonis, MD, MPH
Professor and Chairman

Cutting-edge Research and Treatment in Autism at UMass

Jean Frazier, MD, is professor and vice chair of child and adolescent psychiatry, *Robert M. & Shirley S. Siff Chair in Autism*, and co-director of the Child and Adolescent Neurodevelopment Initiative (CANDI) at the UMass Department of Psychiatry. She is an expert in child psychopharmacology and child and adolescent neuropsychiatry.

Since 2008 Dr. Frazier and her research team have been engaged in clinical studies to advance the understanding of the underlying causes of developmental, emotional and behavioral disorders in youth. Technologies such as MRI are used to investigate the structure and function of the brain with the hope of characterizing normal development and advance the knowledge of abnormal emotional and behavioral development. This work will help improve the diagnosis and treatment of children and adolescents who have autism spectrum and mood disorders.

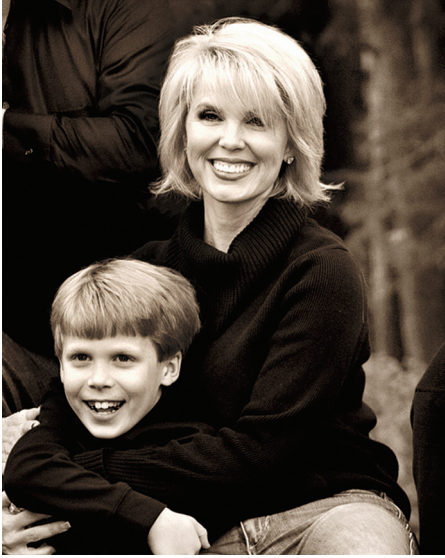
"Dr. Jean Frazier is not only a world-class clinical and translational researcher in child and adolescent mental illness, she is a caring clinician who puts patient care first and has demonstrated excellence in teaching and community partnerships," said Douglas Ziedonis, MD, professor and chair of the UMass Department of Psychiatry.



"We are encouraged by the advances in research and the delivery of clinical services to children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders."

Dr. Jean Frazier

One Family's Journey with Asperger's Syndrome



One type of Autism disorder is Asperger's syndrome (AS). About 400,000 families have to face AS.

Shonda Schilling, wife of Major League Baseball All Star, former Boston Red Sox, and World Series championship pitcher, Curt Schilling, told an inspiring story of their son Grant's AS at a public event hosted by the UMass Department of Psychiatry in May, in recognition of Children's Mental Health Awareness Week.

She recounts the struggles to cope with behavioral problems before the diagnosis, the difficulty in identifying the diagnosis, and the challenges and triumphs of the family's journey with AS.

Families like the Schillings experience a full range of emotions when dealing with the symptoms of AS before diagnosis and then when hearing the words, "Your child has Asperger's syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder, which is one of a distinct group of neurological conditions."

"Grant has reminded us what is important in life. I am the better person for it and a happier person for going through this with him." Shonda Schilling

How Can We Explain Asperger's Syndrome?

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), current research indicates that there are brain abnormalities in AS. Using advanced brain imaging techniques, scientists have revealed structural and functional differences in specific regions of the brains of children with AS. These differences are most likely caused by the abnormal migration of embryonic cells during fetal development that affects brain structure and "wiring" and then goes on to affect the neural circuits that control thought and behavior.

Why Is It So Difficult to Diagnose Asperger's Syndrome?

Usually children with AS are very intelligent and verbal so it can be easy to attribute some of their behaviors to just being "different," according to Dr. Frazier.

Schilling recounts that in hindsight there were plenty of signs before her son's diagnosis when Grant was seven years old. Grant's behavior, having outgrown the "cuteness," had become more embarrassing and uncontrollable. Schilling found herself withdrawing.

Signs and symptoms of AS include inappropriate or minimal social interactions, lack of "common sense," odd behaviors or mannerisms, and more. To read more signs and other AS-related parent resources, visit:

www.umassmed.edu/psychiatry/ParentResources.aspx

Are There Effective Interventions for Asperger's Syndrome?

The good news is "yes." "If your child has AS, early intervention is essential. Intervention involving educational and social training, performed while a child's brain is still developing, is highly recommended," says Dr. Frazier. The ideal intervention for AS involves autism-specific types of therapies to address core symptoms of the disorder.

Dr. Frazier states that children with AS may benefit from the following forms of treatment:

- specialized educational interventions;
- social skills training;
- speech and language therapy;
- occupational therapy with sensory integration training for younger children, in which they are desensitized to stimuli (such as sound or light) to which they're overly sensitive;
- psychotherapy or behavioral/cognitive therapy for older children;
- medications for impairing emotional or behavioral challenges;
- parent education and training.



Robert and Shirley Siff

How Can You Help?

If you are interested in supporting the CANDO Initiative of the UMass Department of Psychiatry, please make your donation to:
University of Massachusetts
Memorial Foundation (UMMF)
ATTN: Lisa B. Shapiro
333 South Street
Shrewsbury, MA 01545
508-856-8582

To give online:
w3.umassmed.edu/OnlineDonation

To learn more about the CANDO Initiative, contact:
Laura H. Myers, MSW, EdD
508-856-5747 or
Laurah.Myers@umassmed.edu

Robert M. and Shirley S. Siff Invest in Research and Treatment

Robert and Shirley Siff have generously endowed the *Robert M. and Shirley S. Siff Chair in Autism*, focusing on research and/or clinical work to uncover the causes of, seek a cure for, identify and provide effective treatments for children with autism. Their commitment is a result of having a grandchild diagnosed with autism. "We feel privileged to be able to endow a chair so that this research and treatment can carry on during and after our lifetimes," said the Siffs.

The Siff Chair makes it possible for its recipient, Dr. Jean Frazier, in partnership with Dr. William McIlvane, to develop the Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders (CANDO). CANDO is dedicated to developing and deploying the full spectrum of health care services to children, adults and families with autism, neurodevelopmental disorders and associated disabilities. It will provide patients with family-centered clinical care and support and train the next generation of clinicians through clinical care, basic, translational and applied research.

Future Development of the Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders (CANDO)

Phase I of CANDO, opening in early 2012 on one of the University's Worcester Campuses, will offer clinical services and establish the foundation for future expansion into a fully integrated clinical, research and teaching center. The clinic will enable delivery of services through an interdisciplinary team, serving children and youth with autism, mood disorders, psychosis and anxiety in Central and Western Massachusetts. This population requires multiple healthcare specialists but have no such resources currently available.

Department of Psychiatry
University of Massachusetts Medical School/
UMass Memorial Health Care
55 Lake Avenue North
Worcester, MA 01655

Upcoming Events:

Be Mentally Well Lecture Series:
Understanding the Complex World of Bullying
Oct. 12, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

55 Lake Ave N, Worcester, MA 01655
UMMS Campus, Medical School Building,
Amphitheater 1

More events are posted online:
www.umassmed.edu/PsychiatryCalendar.aspx

Psychiatry Grand Rounds:
Weekly public lectures by experts around the country
on new research findings and medical discoveries
Every Thursday, noon-1 p.m.
55 Lake Ave N, Worcester, MA 01655
UMMS Campus, Medical School Building,
Lazare Auditorium, 1st floor

Topics of future Grand Rounds lectures are updated frequently online:
www.umassmed.edu/psychiatry/ContinuingEd/grand_rounds.aspx

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We would love to hear your suggestions
and feedback!