



## IN THIS ISSUE

1 HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 20TH ANNUAL ADVANCES IN AUTISM CONFERENCE

SEAVER AUTISM CENTER WELCOMES NEW FELLOWS AND SCHOLARS

2 AUTISM CONFERENCE (CONT.)

3 NEW FELLOWS AND SCHOLARS (CONT.)

SEAVER LEADERS PRESENT AT THE 'PHELAN-MCPOSUIM'

4 RECENT PRESENTATIONS  
NEW GRANTS

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

5 INTRODUCING NEW FACULTY AND STAFF

AWARDS AND HONORS

6 SEAVER FOUNDATION SITE VISIT

## Highlights from the 20th Annual Advances in Autism Conference

**O**n September 25, 2016, the Seaver Autism Center hosted the 20th Annual Advances in Autism Conference. To commemorate 20 years of sharing scientific progress, encouraging collaboration, and sparking discussion, the conference was held at the beautiful and historic New York Academy of Medicine. We celebrated with record attendance from a diverse audience of researchers, health-care professionals, educators, and individuals with autism and their families.

Hirschell E. Levine, Esq., co-trustee of the Beatrice and Samuel A. Seaver Foundation, and Joseph D. Buxbaum, PhD, Director of the Seaver Autism Center, opened up the conference and commemorated the significance of the 20th year of this event. Dr. Buxbaum gave a talk titled "The Promise of Personalized Medicine." Following Dr. Buxbaum, Dr. Gordon Ramsay, Director of the Spoken Communications Laboratory at the Marcus Autism Center at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, spoke about speech development



*"The Promise of Personalized Medicine"*

Joseph D. Buxbaum, PhD, Director of the Seaver Autism Center in individuals with autism. After an introduction from John D. Cohen, Esq., co-trustee of the Beatrice and Samuel A. Seaver Foundation, the afternoon continued with a talk by Jennifer Foss-Feig, PhD, a new faculty member at the Seaver Autism Center, about biomarkers and their potential for new treatments. We were honored to host Dr. David Skuse as our keynote speaker, who spoke about the gender discrepancy in

*Continued on page 2*

## Seaver Center Welcomes New Fellows and Scholars

**I**n 2016, we welcomed our sixth class of Seaver Fellows and Scholars. With the generous support of the Seaver Foundation, the Seaver Center supports research and clinical fellowships for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and junior faculty in such areas as genetic analysis, development of model systems for autism, neuroimaging studies, and development and assessment of behavioral and pharmacological interventions for autism.

With this early career support from the Seaver Foundation, fellows and scholars are poised to obtain further funding from a variety of sources, including the National Institutes of Health, and foundations such as Autism Speaks, Autism Science Foundation, and Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation. For example, Pilar Trelles, MD, who is currently in the second year of her Seaver Clinical Fellowship, was recently

awarded funding from The Klingenstein Third Generation Foundation to investigate and improve access to care for minority youth with autism using a Family Peer Advocate model.

A new round of Seaver Fellows and Faculty Scholars begin each year, and awards range in length from two to three years. In 2016, four fellows joined the program.

*Continued on page 3*

# 20th Annual Advances in Autism Conference

Continued

autism. To hear more about Dr. Skuse's talk and research, the Autism Science Foundation posted a podcast on their site [asfpodcast.org](http://asfpodcast.org). We closed out the

conference with a panel of the day's speakers, moderated by Alex Kolevzon, MD who took time to answer questions from the audience.

We are grateful to our community of supporters for joining us year after year to share knowledge and create a community of support and learning.



*"Getting Kids To Talk: Early Vocal Development and its Derailement in ASD"*  
Gordon Ramsay, PhD, Director of Spoken Communication Laboratory,  
Marcus Autism Center, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta



*"What Happened to All the Girls with Autism?"*  
David Skuse, MD, FRCP, FRCPSych, FRCPH, Professor, Behavioural and  
Brain Sciences, Institute of Child Health, University College, London



*"Biomarker Discovery in ASD: They Key to Developing New Treatments"*  
Jennifer Foss-Feig, PhD, Assistant Professor, Seaver Autism Center



Conference Speakers



Speaker Panel moderated by Alex Kolevzon, MD, Clinical Director of the Seaver Autism Center



# New Fellows and Scholars

Continued

## ▶ SEAVER POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

We are joined by three new postdoctoral fellows:

Drew Kiraly, MD, PhD; Yuji Kajiwaru, PhD; and Magdalena Janecka, PhD.



*Drew Kiraly, MD, PhD is a Psychiatry Resident on the Physician-Scientist track. Dr. Kiraly works in the laboratory of Eric Nestler, MD, PhD, where he has been studying the role of gut microflora on the development of cocaine addiction in a mouse model. As a Seaver Fellow, he is applying this model to study intestinal microbiota in autism-related behaviors.*



*Yuji Kajiwaru, PhD, previously a postdoctoral fellow in the lab of Dr. Buxbaum, was promoted to Instructor in the Seaver Autism Center in Spring 2016. Under the mentorship of Elodie Drapeau, PhD, and Dorothy Grice, MD, Dr. Kajiwaru is examining a Slitrk1 frame-shift mutation in mice.*



*Magdalena Janecka, PhD is a postdoctoral fellow in the lab of Dr. Avi Reichenberg. As a Seaver Fellow, Dr. Janecka is working with Dr. Reichenberg to study advanced paternal age and autism risk.*

## ▶ SEAVER GRADUATE FELLOW



*Our new Seaver Graduate Fellow is Elisa Nabel. Ms. Nabel works in the laboratory of Hirofumi Morishita, MD, PhD, and her graduate work is focused on attentional circuit maturation in ASD.*

The Seaver Fellowship Program enhances all areas of research at the Seaver Autism Center, and has proven to be a successful launching pad for young scientists. We are grateful to the Seaver Foundation for this ongoing support and contribution to the research and treatment of ASD. 2017 Awardees will be announced soon!

# Seaver Leaders Present at the Phelan-McPosium

The Phelan-McPosium is organized by the Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation with funding from the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). This symposium brings together researchers and families affected by Phelan-McDermid Syndrome (PMS), with the goal of

having the voices of patients and their caregivers be heard and considered in designing and conducting future studies. This year's symposium, held from July 21-22, had over 500 attendees, including over 150 families of individuals with PMS. The Seaver Autism Center has been working closely

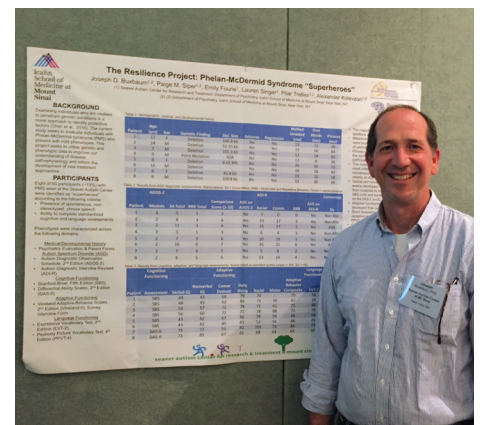
with the Phelan-McDermid Syndrome since 2010 to support families affected by PMS. Dr. Buxbaum and Dr. Kolevzon attended this year's symposium to discuss new findings and directions in genetics, communication, resilience and gastrointestinal issues.



*Joseph Buxbaum, PhD, participated in a Panel Discussion on Genetics in Phelan-McDermid Syndrome.*



*Alex Kolevzon, MD, participated in a Panel Discussion on communication in Phelan-McDermid Syndrome. Dr. Kolevzon also participated in a Panel Discussion on gastrointestinal issues, and he gave a presentation on the "Natural History of PMS"*



*Drs. Buxbaum and Kolevzon also gave a poster presentation titled "The Resilience Project: Phelan-McDermid 'Superheroes.'"*

# Introducing New Faculty and Staff

**JENNIFER FOSS-FEIG, PHD**, joined the Seaver Center in August 2016 as an Assistant Professor. She was formerly a Postdoctoral Associate at the Yale Child Study Center and Department of Psychiatry. Her research is focused in the neural bases of ASD and related neurodevelopmental disorders, with a particular emphasis on neural mechanisms subserving sensory and cognitive processing. She will pioneer neuroimaging and neurophysiology studies for improved patient stratification and outcomes.



**EVA VELTHORST, PHD**, joined Mount Sinai in 2014 as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow, and was promoted to Assistant Professor in the Seaver Autism Center in September 2016. Her research is dedicated to extending knowledge about the causes and treatment of social impairment in mental illness, by bridging several scientific areas, including psychiatry, epidemiology, genetics and psychology. Dr. Velthorst has been selected to be a 2017 Seaver Faculty Scholar.



**SAVANNAH LENNERTZ** is the new Marketing and Communications Associate for the Seaver Autism Center. Savannah graduated from Pennsylvania State University in 2013 with a degree in Health Policy and Administration, and formerly worked at the Weill Cornell Medical College in the Internal Medicine Residency Program. She joined Mount Sinai in the Fall of 2015, and joined the Seaver Autism Center in September of 2016 to handle communications and outreach, as well as expand fundraising and development initiatives.



## Awards and Honors

► **JOSEPH BUXBAUM, PHD** received the Richard Todd Award at this year's WCPG conference, given each year by the International Society of Psychiatric Genetics (ISPG) to a researcher for an outstanding contribution to the genetics of child psychiatry.



► **JOSEPH BUXBAUM, PHD** was inducted into the National Academy of Medicine at the Induction Ceremony on October 15, 2016.



► **DREW KIRALY, MD, PHD** received the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology Young Investigator Memorial Travel Award.

► **PILAR TRELLES, MD**, Seaver Clinical Fellow, received the AACAP Pilot Research Award for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Residents and Junior Faculty.

## Seaver on the Web

Visit our website at [www.seaverautismcenter.org](http://www.seaverautismcenter.org) to learn more about current studies and new developments.



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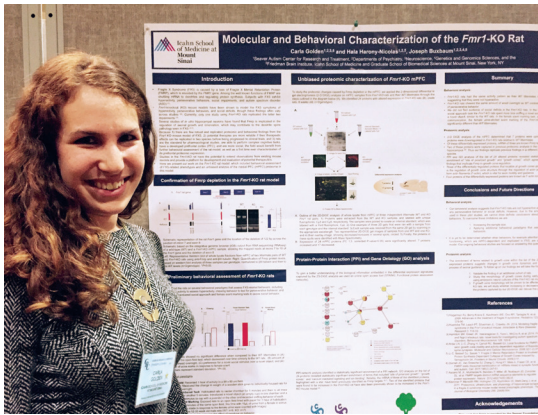


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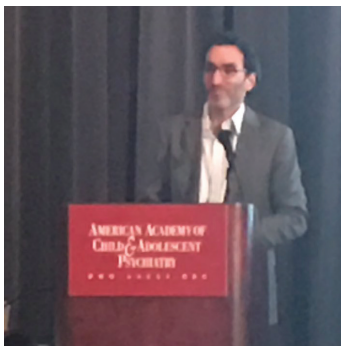


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## Recent Presentations



**CARLA GOLDEN**, Graduate Student at the Seaver Autism Center, presented a poster titled “Molecular and Behavioral Characterization of the *Fmr1*-KO Rat” at the *Fragile X and Autism-Related Disorders* Gordon Research Conference in June 2016.



**ALEXANDER KOLEVZON, MD**, chaired a series of talks for the “Autism Spectrum Disorder: From Clinical Assessment to Novel Treatments” session at the *63rd Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* on October 26, 2016. Speakers for the session included Lauren Donnelly, PhD, Michelle Gorenstein-Holtzman, PsyD, and Pilar Trelles, MD from the Seaver Autism Center.



**SILVIA DE RUBEIS, PHD**, Instructor at the Seaver Autism Center, presented a workshop talk titled “From high throughput genetic data to identifying candidate genes for neuropsychiatric disorders” at the *New Methods to Investigate Neuropsychiatric Disease Workshop* at the Center for Chemistry and Biomedicine at the University of Innsbruck, Austria in November 2016. While in Europe, Dr. Rubeis also presented a seminar titled “Unraveling the genetics of autism and related disorders” at the Università Campus Biomedico of Rome, Italy, and a seminar titled “Genetics and genomics of autism spectrum disorder: embracing complexity” at the University of Turin, Italy. She was also invited to give a talk titled “Genetics and genomics of autism spectrum disorder: embracing complexity” in a course focused on ASD at the 19th Annual Meeting of the Italian Society of Human Genetics in Turin, Italy.

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## New Grants

► **INTEGRATIVE GENOMICS TO MAP RISK GENES AND PATHWAYS IN AUTISM AND EPILEPSY**

Led by Dalila Pinto, PhD, the goal of this study is to identify risk genes and components of the emerging molecular pathways shared among autism and epilepsy as necessary steps toward more tailored treatments. This grant was awarded by the National Institute of Mental Health.

► **AUTISM AND PRENATAL ENDOCRINE DISRUPTORS**

Led by Avi Reichenberg, PhD, the goal of the project is to use existing population-based resources to examine how exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals in pregnancy contributes to risk of developing autism. This grant was awarded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

► **IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE FOR MINORITY YOUTH WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER USING A FAMILY PEER ADVOCATE MODEL**

Awarded to Pilar Trelles, MD by the Klingenstein Third Generation Foundation, this project aims to improve access to care for minority youth with ASD, while evaluating the effectiveness of a family peer advocate model.

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## Recent Publication

► **RAPID AND OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF NEURAL FUNCTION IN AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER USING TRANSIENT VISUAL EVOKED POTENTIALS**

Siper P, Zemon V, Gordon J, George-Jones J, Lurie S, Zweifach J, Tavassoli T, Wang AT, Jamison J, Buxbaum JD, & Kolevzon A.



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• **THE SEAVER AUTISM CENTER NEWSLETTER** brings you timely updates about new developments related to research and treatment of autism spectrum disorders, as well as activities at the Seaver Autism Center. To be placed on our mailing list, please contact [SeaverCenterEditor@mssm.edu](mailto:SeaverCenterEditor@mssm.edu) or The Seaver Autism Center, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, One Gustave L. Levy Place, Box 1230, New York, NY 10029. Our phone number is 212.241.0961 and our website is [www.SeaverAutismCenter.org](http://www.SeaverAutismCenter.org).

• **SEAVER IS CONTINUING TO GO GREEN!** Please send your email address to [SeaverCenterEditor@mssm.edu](mailto:SeaverCenterEditor@mssm.edu) to receive this newsletter electronically.

## Seaver Foundation Site Visit

At the 2016 annual Seaver Foundation Site Visit this past October, the Trustees of the Beatrice and Samuel A. Seaver Foundation, Hirschell E. Levine, Esq., and John D. Cohen, Esq. made a generous donation to the Seaver Autism Center in addition to the Foundation's annual pledge and their support of Seaver Fellowships and Faculty Scholar Awards. As always, the Seaver Autism Center is extraordinarily grateful to the Seaver Foundation for their unwavering support and generosity since the founding of the Center in 1993.



*Mr. Levine and Mr. Cohen presenting their gift to  
Dennis Charney, MD, Dean of the  
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai*



*Dr. Buxbaum and Dean Charney with  
Mr. Levine and Mr. Cohen*

*If you would like to support active research and programs at the  
Seaver Autism Center, please visit [www.seaverautismcenter.org](http://www.seaverautismcenter.org)  
or call 212-241-0961.*