11-30-2012

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AUTISM RESEARCH PAPER ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION

November 30, 2012 by Sue Reeves

A research paper by Judith Holt and Keith Christensen entitled “Utahns’ understanding of autism spectrum disorder” has been accepted for publication by Disability and Health Journal.

The purpose of the study, which was conducted by the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) between June and September 2010, was to determine the public’s understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and its prevalence, characteristics and treatment, as well as the source of that knowledge. It was funded by a federal grant associated with the Combating Autism Act Initiative of 2006.

According to Holt, the study was a collaboration between UDOH and Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities as part of Utah’s State Plan for Improving Outcomes for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Developmental Disabilities.

“We all had our opinions on what we thought people knew about autism,” Holt said, but it was mostly anecdotal and there was very little in the way of structured surveys.

The study, modeled on the CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), surveyed a random sample of 1,001 Utah residents age 18 and older. The 32-question survey included questions like “What do you think causes autism?” and “Where have you gotten most of your information about autism?”

In part, the study found that the majority of Utahns do not feel knowledgeable about autism and that education efforts using printed materials are not very effective, suggesting the future use of TV or radio outlets. Education and outreach efforts also should be made available in Spanish.

Holt said the results of the study are being used by UDOH, the CPD and parent groups to move forward with public awareness activities. Based on the results of this study, another grant was received to do intensive promotion of the Centers for Disease Control’s “Learn the signs. Act early” campaign.