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Center for Persons With Disabilities

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CHANGES BROADEN AUTISM DEFINITION, ELIMINATE ASPERGER’S

December 7, 2012 by Sue Reeves

The American Psychiatric Association last weekend endorsed changes to the upcoming edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders that will broaden the definition of autism, but eliminates Asperger’s syndrome. The manual is used by mental health professionals for diagnosing illness and for research. The newest edition, referred to as DSM-5, is meant to incorporate research in the 18 years since the previous major revision was completed in 1994.

According to Bloomberg.com, critics have said that the elimination of Asperger’s as a unique diagnosis may limit access to care for some high-functioning people who previously might have been diagnosed with the syndrome.

“I don’t believe any of us can say for sure what the impact will be. It is likely there will be some people who previously would have been diagnosed with autism that won’t receive that diagnosis now,” said George Wootton, nurse practitioner in the Biomedical Division of the Center for Person with Disabilities at Utah State University. “The goal is not to diagnose fewer people, but to better diagnose them and, even more important, to develop more appropriate interventions. If autism doesn’t fit, we should still be acknowledging the impairing behaviors and emotions, and directing our work towards healing what isn’t working for them.”