

# SCIENCE LIFE

University of Chicago Medical Center: A blog of news and ideas in biomedicine

## Dr. FAQ: Sharon Hirsch on Autism

Posted Rob Mitchum at 10:43 AM CT, November 24, 2009

Here at Science Life, we often focus on fresh laboratory findings that could be years away from being applied to patients in a clinic. Popular newspapers and magazines, meanwhile, sometimes get caught up in controversies surrounding health and medicine without focusing in on core questions that many patients have about common diseases and conditions. And with a tangle of information - reputable and otherwise - about common health topics available on the internet, it is often hard for people to navigate quickly to the reliable medical answers they seek.

So we're launching a recurring feature here on the blog where a University of Chicago Medical Center physician will address - in a series of short Q&A-style videos - frequently asked questions about a popular medical topic. These videos are meant to be patient-focused and to offer clear, accurate information about common diseases and the accepted medical treatments currently available. If you have a medical topic you would like to see featured in future videos, or if you have questions you would like to have answered by a U of C Physician, don't hesitate to contact the editors.

There's really no better subject to kick off this series than autism, the psychiatric disorder of communication and social behavior most commonly seen in children. Autism is in the news on an almost daily basis, and this week was no exception - Chicago Tribune reporters Trine Tsouderos and Patricia Callahan continued their excellent series Sunday and Monday on the proliferation of dangerous experimental treatments for autism that have little to no scientific basis. Last month, the journal *Pediatrics* published the results of a national survey that found that slightly more than 1 out of every 100 children have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, a higher figure than previously estimated - though experts have debated whether this reflects a rise in autism rates or an increase in diagnosis of the disease.



Sharon Hirsch, M.D. (above, left), Section Chief for Child & Adolescent Psychiatry in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience at the University of Chicago Medical Center, treats many children with autism spectrum disorders each year through

the Medical Center's Neurodevelopmental Clinic. We interviewed her in her office last week about the latest autism numbers, how the disease is diagnosed by psychiatrists, how it is currently treated, and the types of challenges children with the disorder face at school and at home.

***To see the video where Dr. Hirsch speaks on the rates of Autism please put this link in your browser:***

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4sXtLPurzw&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4sXtLPurzw&feature=player_embedded)

***To see the video where Dr. Hirsch speaks on Autism screening please put this link in your browser:***

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyrzoQsuKVY&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyrzoQsuKVY&feature=player_embedded)

For more on research in Psychiatry and Other Fields at the University of Chicago Medical Center, please visit: <http://sciencelife.uchospitals.edu>

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