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# Finding Answers in the Uncertainty of Autism

By Jennifer Wake

When a child is diagnosed with a developmental disability such as autism, a parent's world can be turned on end. For many, questions about treatment options available and which approaches are the best

for their child.

Area clinical psychologist Jennifer Crossland, Ph.D., who works locally as a consultant with children on the autistic spectrum says navigating through the special education system is difficult even when you're trained in it. "It's emotionally draining," she says.

The biggest hurdle for kids with disabilities, says Crossland, is being effectively integrated into the schools and into a collaborative environment. "For most levels of autism, it's more beneficial if they can be integrated into a general education classroom with special education support versus a special day class. They need the social models and need to work on engagement."

Lafayette resident, counselor and director of Enhanced Learning & Growth Center in Walnut Creek, Sindy Wilkinson, M.Ed. LMFT, adds that social isolation, bullying and ridicule – subtle and overt – can cause significant pain for students with difficulties of attention and learning. "When difficulties in communication are an issue, social difficulties are exacerbated."

For young children on the spectrum, a combination of therapies such as Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and Floor Time – a therapy that increases back-and-forth interaction and communication between child and adult – work well together. Additional support such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, sensory integration, physical therapy and behavioral therapy are used in tandem with these broader approaches to elicit the best outcomes.

However, Wilkinson notes the success of any therapy (and a combined approach is often most effective), is dependent a great deal upon listening to the student, working with him/her rather than forcing something. And limited funds, time and education for our teachers makes it hard for them to meet the needs of all their students and those with attention and learning challenges. "This becomes a challenge for everyone," she says.

Many parents seek additional services outside the school system. "Some are good," notes Crossland. "Some lack data. I encourage parents that if their gut tells them to do something, they should try it, if it's not too costly."

The most effective therapies in Wilkinson's opinion are those that address the issues from the inside out – therapies that "integrate neurodevelopmental systems, regulate nutritional deficiencies, work with the child from where they are (not where they are expected to be) and allow

for development and progress from there are the most sustainable."

It's also important to facilitate goals at home, says Crossland. "There's much more to a child's life than school."

Wilkinson says parents make two common mistakes: they do something for a child instead of allowing the child the extra time to complete a task; and they react to behavior rather than respond to the underlying cause of the behavior.

Parents also think the professionals they're working with are the experts, they know best, says Crossland. "Parents are the ones who know their child best. They really need to be an active part of the team – help the professionals set the goals. There should be a dialogue. It really is a team process."

And as children on the spectrum age, their needs will change.

Each year, one in 88 children are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder and according to Autism Speaks vice president of family services, Lisa Goring, an estimated 500,000 teens and young adults will enter adulthood in the next decade.

Families and community members seeking answers about how to help their child or how to support these individuals in our community can attend the Lamorinda Family Center's first disabilities conference and resource fair, "Living with Disabilities," from 4 to 7 p.m. Saturday, October 28 at the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church in Lafayette.

The resource fair will include booths with several social skills and life skills professionals, speech pathologists, respite care providers, and counselors as well as unique services such as a music therapy and a technology booth featuring programs available on the iPad. Following the fair, guest speaker Dr. Ricki Robinson, autism expert, pediatrician, and cofounder of Autism Speaks, will discuss how to understand behaviors in children with autism and other special needs, treatment approaches, how to best support children with special needs and the many adults coming of age with autism in the community.

"We're going to have a lot of kids out there who are going to need support as adults," says Crossland. "We need to be ready for that."

For more information about the conference, visit [www.lopc.org](http://www.lopc.org). To learn more about The Enhanced Learning & Growth Center, visit [www.learningandgrowth.com](http://www.learningandgrowth.com).

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## ASK SAM



Samira Davi is a Nurse Liaison for ManorCare Health Services in Walnut Creek. Samira has over 10 years of experience working in health care in Contra Costa County, which has gained her a wide view of what is important to the health care consumer. She will be posting common questions and comments in each issue of the Lamorinda Weekly. You are welcome to contact Samira directly at 925.270.8766

## Medicare Options

The most common question I answer for patients and families is related to benefits and coverage for post-acute rehab. In this election year, we hear about Medicare and insurance on a daily basis. Some of the things we hear can be kind of frightening, and at the very least perplexing. We don't know exactly how, or even if, Medicare will change. What we **do** know is that there are under-utilized programs within Medicare that, as far we know, will still be a part of the plan regardless of any health care reform.

There are some key points of the Medicare benefit as it relates to post-acute rehab. First and foremost, there is the "qualifying stay". In order to utilize the Medicare benefit in a post-acute center you must have an inpatient hospital stay lasting a minimum of three consecutive nights. Things have gotten a bit tricky: sometimes an overnight stay in the hospital is not considered "inpatient"; it is considered an

"observation" stay. In that case, you've not met the initial qualifying stay. ManorCare is able to validate this prior to admission to ensure you've meet the initial stay.

Once you are admitted to a post-acute center, Medicare allows for 100 days in a benefit period for post-acute rehab (or a "skilled nursing facility"). After you are admitted, ManorCare determines your eligibility for continued coverage on a weekly basis. If you continue to require this level of intensive rehab and/or complex medical care in order to return to your highest level of practical function, Medicare will continue to cover your stay (for up to that 100 days). When you no longer require such intensive rehab or complex care, you'll graduate and go home!

What if you graduate from the program, return home, and find yourself needing rehab again? I do get calls from patients who need to come back in for continued rehab—they are just not succeeding at home as they'd hoped. Most often this happens when someone goes home *before* they've met their goals and graduated. It's hard to be away from home, and sometimes our homesickness gets the best of us. Medicare allows for readmission in what we call the "30-Day Window". If you have been in a rehab center or have had a qualifying hospital stay in the last 30-days, you are eligible to return to the rehab center under Medicare without a new qualifying hospital stay. Sometimes I talk with patients who discharged from the hospital and never admitted to a rehab center—they went straight home and skipped rehab. The "Window" allows one to take advantage of post-acute rehab even if they declined it initially.

I've found that there are often more options with Medicare and other insurances than we think. If you feel you can benefit from intensive rehab services or complex medical care, please call me and I'm happy to find out if you qualify. They are your benefits—use them! For more questions regarding Medicare or insurance benefits for post-acute rehab, please call me or either of our Walnut Creek locations.

For more information please visit [www.manorcare.com](http://www.manorcare.com).  
For a short video visit us on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/hcrmanorcare](http://www.youtube.com/hcrmanorcare)

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## Resources for Parents of Children with Autism

*The Fabric of Autism* by Judith Bluestone is a wonderful book that describes the many underlying causes involved in an individual with challenges as well as effective treatments. This book applies to all issues of learning and attention, not only autism.

*Smart Moves* by Carla Hannaford describes sensory irregularities that effect students with challenges and gives many suggestions on how to ease these sensitivities.

*Transforming the Difficult Child* by Dr. Howard Glasser is a step by step parenting program that helps parents focus on positive behaviors to improve attitude and behavior.

*Autism Solutions: How to Create a Healthy and Meaningful Life for Your Child* by Ricki Robinson, M.D., M.P.H.

*Engaging Autism* by Stanley Greenspan and Serena Weider

*The Child with Special Needs* by Stanley Greenspan and Serena Weider

*Understanding Applied Behavioral Analysis* by Albert Kearney

*The Out of Sync Child-Coping with Sensory Processing* by Carol Stock Kranowitz

*The Out of Sync Child Has Fun* by Carol Stock Kranowitz

<http://www.myautismteam.com/> is a Facebook-like website that connects parents with other parents who understand as well as local providers and venues that others have found helpful.

List compiled by Sindy Wilkinson, M.Ed. LMFT, and Jennifer Crossland, Ph.D.