

Virtual Training for Building Capacity for Autism Diagnosis a Tremendous Success!

On November 12 – 13, 2020, Dr. Cassandra Newsom, Director of the Civitan Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disability Research (CANDR) Core at University of Alabama at Birmingham and Dr. Rajesh Kana, Director of the Center for Innovative Research in Autism (CIRA) at University of Alabama, partnered to co-host a 2-day virtual training on a gold-standard diagnostic measure in the field of autism, the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) -2nd Edition.

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) occur in approximately 1 in 54 children. ASD impact a child's development, social communication and interaction skills, and include an increase in repetitive behaviors or narrow or strong interests. Diagnosing ASD early in life and providing intensive intervention is critical to helping children and families living with ASD. Providers must have expertise in child development and mastery of diagnostic tools, such as the ADOS-2, to accurately diagnose a child with ASD. However, across the country, there are too few providers who are adequately trained to give the ADOS-2. This shortage means families often wait a long time before receiving a diagnosis, which delays access to critical interventions. Recognizing the need to increase capacity for autism diagnosis in Alabama, the Civitan International Research Center invited Dr. Rachel Hundley, Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, to lead an ADOS-2 training via zoom.

Dr. Hundley is a nationally recognized expert in autism diagnosis, and she led providers and graduate trainees in an engaging and interactive training. During the 2-day event, attendees watched diagnostic evaluations of children with ASD, practiced scoring the ADOS-2, and discussed the research supporting this method of diagnosis. Even though in-person learning has been hampered because of COVID-19 restrictions, the virtual training allowed the event to reach providers both within the state of Alabama and across the world; including 47 providers and trainees from Alabama, 11 providers from across the United States, 5 providers from India, and 1 from British Columbia.

Clinicians and Researchers at UAB and UA, who are trained in the diagnosis of autism, will improve services for Alabama families and advance research into the causes of autism and development of treatments. Drs. Kana and Newsom plan to continue to build on this successful collaboration with future trainings and research initiatives.

