

HAMASPIK GAZETTE

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News of Hamaspiik Agencies and General Health



Purim Decision 2016: Picking Packs, Proffering Picks and Presenting Preferences

At Hamaspiik Homes, Persons Supported in Personal Penchants and Proclivities

Dressing as a clown, a butterfly, or a rabbit was on the menu.

And at Fosse, the choice was “Yes!” for all three.

It was Purim, you see, the holiday symbolizing G-d’s costumed hand in everything that happens in life (hence the symbolic costumes).

And at the Fosse Shvesterheim Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA) group home, part of the Hamaspiik of Rockland County network, it was indubitably Purim as three otherwise conventional residents individually opted for those unconventional outfits.

But not to worry: the entire world around them—at least the immediate neighborhood—had also gone merrily mad, at least for a day, with neighbors and strangers alike flitting by in ridiculous getups, and the more ridiculous and laugh-induc-

ing, the better.

On conventional days, decisions revolve around what to eat for breakfast, which task to complete first, or even which tasks make it onto your to-do list.

On Purim, it’s not just “What do I wear?” but “Who will I visit?”, “What will I give them?” and, not to forget, “Should I also run for President?” (Just kidding.)

Serving up selection

Purim was definitely cooking at Hamaspiik of Kings County, where the South 9th Shvesterheim IRA served up all the old-time Eastern European Purim culinary traditions for the Purim *seudah* meal.

Those would include kreplach, which are not to be confused with krait or holiptches.

But personal choice at Purim

was also cooking at South 9th, where “this year was amazing because the girls were so involved,” reports Home Manager Mrs. Malkie Cziment. “They made their decisions.”

Those decisions, besides whether to eat any combination of kreplach, kraut or holiptches, revolved around selecting Purim costumes from catalogs or local brick-and-mortar shops, as well as browsing the aisles of neighborhood discount stores for original Mishloach Manos containers.

The Sunday before Purim, which would be March 20, the young women were driven as far as upstate Monsey and Kiryas Joel to execute early deliveries of Purim goodie packages to parents.

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ROLLING, WITH LAUGHTER Hamaspiik “Day Habbbers” Motty (L) and Pinchos (R), and bakery staff, find matzah-making fun

Well Before Purim, a Taste of Passover at a Community Matzah Bakery

Hamaspiik of Rockland County’s Day Hab Gets Hands-on Familiarity

It wasn’t even Purim. But Hamaspiik of Rockland County Men’s Division Day Hab Director Pinchas Knopfler was already getting his “boys” ready for Passover.

The latter holiday, coming exactly one month after the former holi-

day, is centered on matzah: The crunchy, flat and round crackers that are rife with symbolism.

Using nothing but the cleanest wheat flour and the purest water,

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Embracing Future, Hamaspiik Moves to ‘Support, not Care’ of People with Disabilities

Furthering Industry Shift, Agency Retrains Managers in New Person-centered Values

Leading the nation once again, New York State’s official disability-services body is now deep into a paradigm shift in how people with disabilities are provided with care.

But the sea change at the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the latest from the state that created the

Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA) group-home model, is about something far bigger than how caregivers view care.

It’s about seeing it as *support*, not *care*.

And at Hamaspiik, an OPWDD non-profit partner since its inception, introducing staff once again to

that shift was the order of the day this past February 16th.

Breaking down barriers

What’s happening at the OPWDD now, in plain English, is that you don’t care for people who have intellectual or developmental disabilities—you support them.

There was a time not long ago that discrimination, isolation and the resulting unfairness was acceptable. Society was largely provincial: The so-called “normal” and “retarded,” the mainstream and institutionalized, the abled and disabled. Institutions and their concomitant isolation bolstered that notion.

Geraldo Rivera, intrepid reporter in the 1970s, triggered the tsunami that eventually washed that all away with his exposure of shocking condi-

tions at New York’s Willowbrook institution.

In the wake of Willowbrook rose today’s first Individualized Residential Alternatives (IRAs), the small group homes in the thick of residential neighborhoods that put people who have disabilities right among us—where they really always belonged.

By the early 2010s, the progressive arc of history had bent to the point where not only was there widespread integration for people with disabilities, but the beginning of seeing them just as people—and the end of seeing them primarily for their disabilities.

Reinterpreting care

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HAMASPIK GAZETTE

Services Provided by NYSHA Agencies



O P W D D

Community Habilitation

Providing: Personal worker to achieve daily living skill goals

Home Based Respite

Providing: Relief for parents of special needs individuals

After School Respite

Providing: A program for after school hours and school vacations

Supplemental Day Hab Program

Providing: an extended day program

Camp Neshomah Summer Day Program

Providing: A day program during summer and winter school breaks

Individual Residential Alternative

Providing: A supervised residence for individuals who need out-of-home placement

Individual Support Services

Providing: Apartments and support for individuals who can live independently

Family Support Services

Providing: Reimbursement for out of ordinary expenses for items or services not covered by Medicaid

Day Habilitation

Providing: a Day program for adults with special needs

Article 16 Clinic

Providing: Physical therapy · Occupational therapy · Speech therapy · Psychology · Social work · Psychiatry · Nursing · Nutrition

Environmental Modification

Providing: Home modifications for special needs individuals

Supported Employment

Providing: support and coaching for individuals with disabilities to be employed and maintain employment

Enhanced Supported Employment

Providing: Job developing and coaching for people with any type of disability

Medicaid Service Coordination

Providing: An advocate for the individual to coordinate available benefits

Home Family Care

Providing: A family to care for an individual with special needs

Intermediate Care Facility

Providing: A facility for individuals who are medically involved and developmentally delayed

IBS

Providing: Intensive Behavior Services

Plan of Care

Providing: Support for the families of individuals with special needs

D O H

Traumatic Brain Injury

Providing: Service Coordination · Independent living skills training · Day programs · Rent subsidy · Medical equipment · E-Mods · Transportation · Community transmittal services · Home community support services

Early Intervention

Providing: Multidisciplinary and supplemental Evaluations · Home and community based services · Center based services · Parent/child groups · Ongoing service coordination · Physical therapy · Occupational therapy · Speech therapy · Special education · Nutrition · Social work · Family training · Vision services · Bilingual providers · Play therapy · Family counseling

Care At Home

Providing: Nursing · Personal care aide · Therapy · Respite · Medical supplies · Adaptive technology · Service coordination

Nursing Home Transition and Diversion

Providing: Service Coordination · Assistive technology · Moving assistance · Community transitional services · Home community support services · E-Mods · Independent living skills · Positive behavioral interventions · Structured day program

Child & Adult Care Food Program

Providing: Breakfast · Lunch · Supper · Snack

L H C S A - HamaspiKare

Personal Care & Support Services

Providing: Home Health Aides · Homemakers · Personal Care Aides · Housekeepers · HCSS aides

Counseling Services

Providing: Dietician/Nutrition counselors · Social Workers

Rehabilitation Services

Providing: Physical therapy · Speech therapy · Occupational therapy · Individuals

PACE-CDPAP

Providing: Personal aides for people in need

Social and Environmental Supports

Providing: Minor maintenance for qualified patients

Social Model

Providing: A social day program for senior patients

Nursing Services

Providing: Skilled observation and assessment · Care planning · paraprofessional supervision · clinical monitoring and coordination · Medication management · physician-ordered nursing intervention and skill treatments

HamaspiK CHOICE

A Managed Long Term Care Plan (MLTCP) approved by New York State

H C R

Access To Home

Providing: Home modifications for people with physical disabilities

RESTORE

Providing: Emergency house repairs for senior citizens

HOME

Rehabilitation Program

Providing: Remodeling dilapidated homes for low income home owners

N Y S E D

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Providing: Employment planning · Job development · Job placement

Job coaching

Intensive and ongoing support for individuals with physical, mental and/or developmental disabilities to become employed and to maintain employment

N Y S H A

Training

Providing: SCIP · CPR & first aid · Orientation · MSC CORE · AMAP · Annual Updates · Com-Hab/Respite · Family Care training · Supportive Employment

Central Intake

Providing: The first contact for a person or family in need of HamaspiK services

HamaspiK Gazette

Providing: A bilingual monthly newspaper informing the community of available HamaspiK services

Parental Retreats

Providing: Getaways and retreats for parents of special needs individuals · Parent support groups

Californian with Non-verbal Autism, Synesthesia, Sees and Paints Feelings

Artist Jeremy Sicile-Kira to Host
First Exhibition of Unique Artwork

So much for inability to contribute!

Despite communicating with the world only through a computer keyboard, California artist Jeremy Sicile-Kira, 27, clearly has a lot to offer.

Jeremy doesn't just have a gift for painting, or non-verbal autism, but also the very rare neurological condition called synesthesia.

The condition, in which the brain's sensory centers process signals from the "wrong" sources, allows people who have it to see sound, hear vision—or, in Jeremy's case, see letters, words and emotions in color.

Now, Jeremy has put brush to paint and canvas to show the world the things that only his unique eye and mind have seen. Mr. Sicile-Kira is set to host his first solo art exhibit.

The exhibition, entitled "Inner Dimensions," opens on April 11 at Space4Art in downtown San Diego.

The young artist got his start in art three years ago, when he was inspired by a dream.

"For many years I dreamt I was painting people's colors into portraits. Then one night I dreamt I had a great art show of my paintings," he told a local news outlet. "I

was really excited and asked my mom how to truly have an art show."

When told that to have an art show, he'd have to first produce art, Jeremy took up painting. "I was surprised to see that I could," he said.

"As a nonverbal person with autism, it is hard to ... feel that there is something I can contribute to society," he said. "My gift of synesthesia and painting is one way I frankly can give people pleasure."

"A lot of people with disabilities are always looking at their disability and not their abilities," his mother, Chantal, told the news outlet. "Jeremy is one of the people that's been told he should be institutionalized and he'll never amount to anything. [Painting] can be a way for him to earn money eventually and that's a thing that's important to tell people because people like Jeremy need support ... but they can also be people who give back to the community."

"Imagine if he never learned how to type, or imagine if he never told me [he wanted to paint]," she added emotionally.

For his part, Jeremy told the same outlet that he's "looking forward" to his first exhibit, adding, "Truly, there is a gift inside everyone waiting to be recognized." ■

Haircuts Cause Strokes?

It's a rarity of rarities, but tilting the head back more than 20 degrees while leaning back in a salon chair can actually cause a stroke. The prolonged leaning back of the head and neck to allow hair to be washed in a bowl, otherwise known as hyperextension, can possibly cause damage to neck arteries. In turn, that can lead to internal blood clots

and resulting strokes.

A 48-year-old California woman who suffered a stroke in 2014 after such a rare incident is now suing, and is telling her story nationwide.

Doctors suggest using towels to prop up the head in such washbowls, or to face forward. ■

Drones Poised to Make Major Healthcare Debut

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) Will Eventually
Respond to Disaster Zones, Deliver Rural Meds

A Mississippi professor. A Silicon Valley startup. An American governor. A Virginia business. An Australian company. What do they all have in common?

They're all excited about one of the next big things in modern medicine—at least in emergency medicine: Using drones to deliver medicine where ambulances and even people cannot.

But the increasingly popular retail flying machines, most commonly known today for recreational, photographic or video usage, are also being increasingly drafted into healthcare.

Using drones to deliver what's known as telehealth consists of three general stages—in which a handful of independent researchers and entrepreneurs have made various advances.

The first, of which most current drones are capable, is live aerial photo and video of accident or disaster zones that emergency crews cannot access.

The second, which requires larger, more technology-equipped and custom-built drones, is delivery of medical equipment and drugs for usage by EMTs at blocked-access disaster scenes.

The third is medical command, in which

drones do all of the above—plus use streaming two-way audio and video to allow remote controllers to communicate live with responders at the scene.

Dr. Italo Subbarao of William Carey University has worked on a drone for the past three years that will eventually deliver emergency diagnostic and treatment kits and a live video feed with doctors.

Silicon Valley startup Matternet has been developing medical delivery drones for several years, field-testing them in Haiti to transport medical diagnostic samples from remote clinics to central hospitals. Matternet is currently working with the largely rural country of Bhutan to improve its poor healthcare system.

And a startup using flying machines from Australian drone delivery firm Flirtey was FAA-approved this July to deliver medical supplies to a rural Virginia health clinic.

Medical drone systems will "revolutionize the way we deliver health care," said Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe after his state's test run.

In the meantime, developers will need approval from the FAA, the federal body regulating U.S. airspace. ■

The Senior Care Gazette

News from the World of HamaspikCare, Hamaspik Choice and Senior Health

SEN. FELDER AND STATE DOH CLARIFY NEW PARENT-AIDE LAW WITH HAMASPIKCARE INPUT

Parents Can Serve as CDPAS Aides for Adults with Disabilities Living at Home

Under a bill championed by State Sen. Simcha Felder and signed into law in 2015 by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, parents are now allowed to serve as aides to their own adult children.

The Consumer Directed Personal Aide Service (CDPAS), a program of the New York State Dept. of Health (DOH), pays family members to care for loved ones.

The Medicaid program is geared for seniors and qualifying others with various special needs, allowing children and other rela-

tives to work as personal aides for them in their own homes.

Until April, the law barred parents from serving as CDPAS aides for their kids with special needs.

After months of effort, Sen. Felder secured a critical change in CDPAS rules—allowing parents to be CDPAS aides for their own adult children living at home.

The successful effort was a response to numerous parents faced with the choice of caring for their children with disabilities at home and not going to work, or

going out to work and leaving their adult children at home alone with no help (or outside help).

As is sometimes the case with new laws, or changes to existing laws, some confusion ensued with news of the Felder change. The new law's primary source of confusion was its apparent rule that parents could now indeed serve as aides to their own children—but only if those children were *not* living at home. The age of the child and legal guardianship status were an additional stumbling block.

Amid fielding many calls from excited parents who contacted Hamaspik, HamaspikCare leadership worked closely and extensively with legal counsel and other staff at Sen. Felder's office.

In the run-up to the change going into effect officially April 1, 2016, after weeks of communications between Sen. Felder's team, state DOH leaders and HamaspikCare, the change—and its conditions—have finally been clarified: Parents are indeed allowed to care for their adult chil-

dren with special needs who live with them at home.

"The hard work has paid off," said HamaspikCare Downstate Regional Director Mordechai Wolhendler. "On behalf on the Hamaspik community, thank you, Senator Felder!" ■

For more information please contact HamaspikCare at 718-408-6700 (Brooklyn), 845-503-0700 (Hudson Valley), or intake@hamaspikcare.org.

"OUT OF NETWORK" BUT NOT OUT OF NET OF CARING

Responding to Community Call, Agency Nurses Secure 24-hour Nurse for Family in Need

At the end of the day, there's something bigger than customer service.

Call it what you will—social justice, compassion, love, sharing—but there's more to your job, and life, than just doing your job.

A textbook example of that was HamaspikCare's recent securing of a 24-hour nurse for a family that was not a beneficiary of the home-care services of HamaspikCare.

While HamaspikCare does not regularly do the medical assistance work that is done by many other

worthy community profits, when the call came in, HamaspikCare just couldn't say no.

An older woman called the agency at 11:00 on a recent Friday morning. A large family get-together was unfolding that weekend, and a grandchild with involved medical needs would be staying over.

The child needed a nurse on the premises 'round-the-clock, and the family didn't yet have one. Could HamaspikCare help?

Applying the same level of diligence, attention and genuine

caring that define not nursing but HamaspikCare, Director of Patient Services Rena Milgraum, RN asked Field Nurses Ahuva Chemtob, RN, Estee Deutsch, RN, Rachel Levy, RN and Leah Lichstein, RN if they would be available and/or interested in freelance work.

While none were, they did, however, waste no time networking with fellow nurses beyond HamaspikCare.

With the word put out on their social networks, it wasn't long before an RN out there responded positively to the last-minute opportunity.

And by 3:00 p.m., Mrs. Milgraum was on the phone with a grateful grandmother, reassuring her that an available nurse had been found. ■

HOME HEALTH AIDES (HHAs) FOR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

Shortly before the *Gazette* print deadline, HamaspikCare announced that it is now offering HHA services to Holocaust survivors living in Brooklyn, and in Orange, Rockland and Sullivan Counties, who do not receive Medicaid benefits.

HamaspikCare thanks its newest partner, the Jewish Community County of Greater Coney Island (JCCGCI), and Director Rabbi Moshe Wiener and staff, for their indispensable assistance. Our next issue will feature an article on the service.

Seniors bring hospital bugs to rehab

A University of Michigan Medical School study finds that about 25 percent of seniors transferring to rehab facilities from hospitals carried antibiotic-resistant bugs on their hands.

However, other experts note that insufficient hand-washing and other preventative hygiene in general, not just in hospitals, is just as equally responsible for the bugs' persistent presence.

Following germ testing on admission, the investigators continued to track three common resistant germs, including the potentially serious staph infection known as MRSA.

Almost one-quarter of the patients had at least one such germ on their hands at admission, including MRSA, the researchers reported.

About ten percent then went on to newly acquire at least one type of resistant germ on their hands, and about two-thirds of

carriers still had the germs at discharge, the study revealed.

About two million Americans become infected each year with antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and about 23,000 die as a result, according to the CDC.

Alzheimer's caregivers skip food, work, needs

The centerpiece of the Alzheimer's Association's annual report, released in early April, was a nationwide survey detailing the heavy financial and emotional toll caregivers endure.

According to the survey, caregivers were 28 percent more likely to eat less or go hungry, and one-fifth cut back on doctor visits. Nearly half cut back on their own expenses to afford dementia-related care. And more than one-third reduced their hours at work or quit their job to care for a loved one, losing an average of \$15,000 in income. ■



THE MONTH OF ADAR AT SHNOIS CHAIM
Hamaspik of Orange County's senior program enjoyed (clockwise from left): Purim party settings, treats, and crafting coasters

Purim Decision 2016



"YOU'D JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER?!"

Arcadian resident Pinchos (R) is amused by Chasidish DSP Hillel Spitzer's perfectly Yeshivish Purim persona

Continued from cover

Those hand-packaged containers, filled with love as much as with edibles, also prominently featured photographs of their senders, giving thrilled receivers the big picture.

At South 9th's sister home up in Rockland, the Fosse Shvesterheim adroitly run by Manager Mrs. Esty Landau, food was also on the Purim menu in a big way, what with the group-home cook whipping up an array of meat dishes, among other servings.

Eating out (and just getting out and about) was as big a part of the day as eating in for much of Hamaspik's group-home resident body.

Residents of the Wannamaker Briderheim IRA, the Hamaspik of Rockland County group home expertly led by manager Joel Horowitz, enjoyed not just the one central afternoon feast on Purim day, but an equally enriching one the night before. That party, presided over by a staff DSP, featured Purim-typical singing, dancing and good food.

For Home Manager Yossi Moskovitz of Hamaspik of Kings County's 61st St. Briderheim IRA, those jaunts included runs on parents' homes to drop off Mishloach Manos—and, reports one DSP, a run down Borough Park's famed 13th

Avenue commercial corridor, a veritably impassable beehive of motorized and pedestrian traffic any day of the year, and infinitely more so on Purim.

Still, the gentlemen and their support staff wended their way down the street, soaking up the colorful once-a-year sights and sounds—the upbeat music blaring from store PA systems and passing automobiles alike and the throngs of costumed kids escorted by mothers and fathers.

Once back home from delivering food, there was more food.

Picking paraphernalia

Hamaspik of Orange County's Dinev Inzerheim Intermediate Care Facility (ICF), Hamaspik's oldest group home and its only ICF, saw Program Director Mrs. Etty Brach and staff assist residents in fashioning their own costumes and other paraphernalia in the run-up to this Purim.

Their theme was clowns, and residents reflected that merry motif in every Purim custom: costumes, Mishloach Manos food gift packages and even home décor (though that's not a custom).

In the days before Purim, a plethora of pompoms, or at least yarn for pompoms, was purchased at local retailers for usage at Dinev. The group home's Direct Support

Professionals (DSPs) then painstakingly worked with individual residents to form the furry threads into the familiar balls of fluff.

The pompoms, homemade or bought ready-made, were affixed to headbands, blouses, skirts and other apparel items on Purim day, turning ordinary children into colorful clowns.

The clown getups were only matched with pompom-festooned boxes and tote bags. These would be the Mishloach Manos edible gifts given to family and friends.

"It was very exciting for them," said a Dinev DSP, commenting on the preparatory work begun a week before the festival.

It only got more exciting for them on Purim day, as the residents hung around their house gleefully awaiting guests—who came in the form of off-duty staff and their family members to visit their beloved charges.

Those "shifts," reports the staff member, were Dinev residents' favorite part of Purim.

The sound of Purim

Both getting out and about, and later staying right at home, was music to the ears of the residents of the Grandview Briderheim IRA, another Hamaspik of Rockland County group home.

That's because music—lively, upbeat and downright infectious Purim music—was pumping in the Hamaspik Transport Van as the young gentlemen were shuttled to the homes of their beloved families across the Hudson Valley to deliver Mishloach Manos packages to parents and siblings. (The group even paid a surprise visit to the Kiryas Joel home of Hamaspik founder Mr. Meyer Wertheimer, where it was accorded a royal reception.)

Music filled the air as well back home at Grandview, what with a PA system—complete with six new high-energy CDs bought and uploaded to an MP3 player, and a cordless microphone—on hand to allow the residents to sing along with the songs of their choice as best they could.

Adding another note to the proceedings, notes Manager Joel Schnitzer, was the gift of a Purim-story narration CD by a resident's mother, who contributed the children's recording of the Purim saga told against the background of thrilling and evocative sound effects.

Throughout it all, the PA system and its electronic library of newly-purchased music was available and blasting music all day, with residents seen throughout the day freely picking up the mic to sing to their hearts' content.



PURIM ROUNDS Hamaspik of Rockland County's After-school Respite (ASR) boys get into the holiday spirit

Considering how much individuals with developmental disabilities respond to music, especially when it's live, Manager Mr. Lipa Laufer of Hamaspik of Orange County's Acres Briderheim saw to it that residents were treated to four consecutive afternoon hours of live music, courtesy of the keyboardist in the living room.

Most people, of course, have a keyboardist in the living room.

(All kidding aside, professional "one-man band" keyboardists are virtually a dime a dozen in the Orthodox community on Purim, where their performances are very common and very affordable.)

But on Purim day, reports Mrs. Laufer, off-duty Acres DSPs were constantly circling back to their hearts' callings, visiting their charges on Purim day along with their own broods. The group home's living room was thus a constant scene of foot traffic, as visitors formed circles dancing to the beat of the live music.

More significantly, though, reports Mrs. Laufer, is her repeated yearly observation that people in Kiryas Joel respond enthusiastically to individuals with developmental disabilities on Purim.

This year was no different, Mrs. Laufer points out. Once again, as Acres residents were wheeled or walked through village streets en

route to their Mishloach Manos rounds, complete strangers—in various states of Purim euphoria—were seen stopping to warmly wish the gentlemen a happy holiday or dance for/with them right there on the streets, and usually both.

Most people, of course, make room in their lives for people on the street who happen to have disabilities—even more than those who have a keyboardist in the living room.

At least in "KJ", and at least on Purim.

Delivering the goods

Besides guests strumming guitars, a whole crew of visitors accompanying a Megillah-reader (the Scroll of Esther is read to an exacting chant from a parchment scroll) who read Megillas Esther for residents, and people otherwise coming and going all day, nothing much happened on Purim at South 9th.

Other than that, Purim at the residence was "beautiful" and "extraordinary," reports Mrs. Cziment—and, this year, with a new twist: Twister!

In a burst of democratic decision power, the residents collectively opted for theming most of their Purim paraphernalia with the popular game Twister, whose floor sheet of colored dots has for decades tied

Continued on page E5



PURIM WITH A TWIST(ER) The South 9th Shvesterheim IRA's game-themed goodies



CIRCLE OF CONNECTION Yeshivah boys all the way from Brooklyn join hands and hearts with Hamaspik of Rockland County's Men's Day Hab program at a pre-Purim party

Amid Ongoing Industry Upgrades, Hamaspik of Rockland County Makes Staff Appreciation Part of Holiday

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are the front-line staffers whose critical and vital contributions form the backbone of every disability-services agency like Hamaspik—and that of the entire New York State Office of People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

The DSPs are the hands and feet, eyes and ears, heart and mind of an entire industry—a collective symbol of the imperative to support society's most vulnerable.

The men and women who work across New York State as DSPs, some for decades, do the work that so many others will not.

That's at least partially why the OPWDD has been working in recent years to upgrade and enhance the DSP workforce, and on several fronts.

Sharing the OPWDD's mission of respecting these valued professionals is Hamaspik of Rockland County, which spent virtually the entire Wednesday, March 23 in the person of Director of Residential Services Moshe Sabel to personally delivering a unique message of respect to over 100 Hamaspik DSPs.

GEARING up for industry improvement

Direct support staff who work with individuals with intellectual

and/or developmental disability comprise one of the four sectors of the long term services and supports (LTSS) industry.

With an eye towards the long-term countering of the field's several drawbacks, including low pay and high turnover, Albany authorized the funding of a study to look at solutions.

That study was created and conducted by the University of Minnesota, with critical leadership and input from the New York State Rehabilitation Association (NYSRA) and New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies (NYSACRA).

The result? Career GEAR Up, the OPWDD's DSP credential pilot program.

An acronym for growth, education, advancement, and respect, Career GEAR Up submitted a list of recommendations to the OPWDD—and their implementation is already under way.

Central to the credentialing program is the granting of DSPs the dignity and professionalism of organized career education and training, not unlike therapy or even nursing.

In contrast to the recent past, in which non-profit providers and public-sector entities alike trained their

new DSPs independently, the OPWDD is in the initial stages of rolling out GEAR Up's credentialing model.

The model calls for three percent of DSPs statewide to be enrolled in the credentialing program in its first year and second years, with a goal of enrolling 20 percent of all statewide DSPs by Year Six.

That "First Class" of credentialed DSPs will earn the official title of DSP after putting in the requisite hours of training.

Outpouring of appreciation

Against all that background, Hamaspik of Rockland County sought to make a complimentary addition to it.

With the approach of Purim, the holiday marked, among other things, by the delivery of food servings as a religious requirement, Hamaspik leadership sought to put a holiday spin to upgrading its corner of the DSP industry.

At their regular meeting, Hamaspik of Rockland County Executive Director (and agency founder) Meyer Wertheimer and Mr. Sabel discussed a desire to show the dozens of DSPs across Hamaspik of Rockland County's group homes that "they are appreciated," as Sabel

later told the *Gazette*, "and that their families are appreciated."

The packages, at once the discharge of a Purim rite and acknowledgement of front-line staff and their dedicated work, were painstakingly planned by Hamaspik Special Events Coordinator Mrs. Brenda Katina.

Once purchased, the items were personally assembled into presentable packages by Mr. Sabel and Hamaspik of Rockland County Director of Quality Assurance Eliezer Appel, who remains instrumental in bringing Hamaspik up to speed with the state Core Competencies credentialing.

The item itself was a simple but tasteful hand-washing cup—a ritual item of which you'll find several in every Orthodox Jewish household.

As presented by Hamaspik, each cup also contained some Purim goodies, and lettered with permanent best wishes from Hamaspik leader



INDUSTRY "CUP"-GRADE
Hamaspik of Rockland County staff appreciation, Purim-style

Mr. Wertheimer himself.

Hamaspik "wanted it to be something they would see and use around the house all year," explains Mr. Sabel—thus remembering year-round that they have an employer that appreciates and honors them for the critical work that they do. ■

Continued from page E4

playing friends and family members into knots.

Cookies, tote bags, tablecloths and, above all, Mishloach Manos packages, all featured those signature dots this year—and all so well done that "nobody thinks that they made it," Mrs. Cziment says.

But armed with their Twister-themed packages, the young ladies visited parents all across Williamsburg and Borough Park, where they were thrillingly welcomed with open arms.

Ditto for their sisters at the 38th St. Shvesterheim, where staff DSPs Mr. and Mrs. Chezel (Joel) Fisher lovingly invited residents to join them at the home of Mr. Fisher's own parents.

Of course, the "girls" were also

first transported all over those Brooklyn neighborhoods to pop in on their own parents, which was, reports Manager Mr. Israel Indig, their favorite part of the day. "Every time they visited another house, the excitement started all over again," he reports.

For denizens of the Forshay Briderheim IRA, Hamaspik of Rockland County's first residence, Manager Mrs. Fischer recounts that their primary source of Purim fun was likewise going about Monsey delivering Purim goodies to friends and family in the neighborhood.

On top of that, several elected to spend late Purim afternoon (and well into the evening) at the grand Purim

feast of Grand Rabbi Chaim Rotenberg, known affectionately locally as the "Forshay Rebbe" and whose large synagogue is just down the street from the group home.

Wannamaker residents were likewise presented with options of which friends to which they'd like to personally deliver Mishloach Manos. Those friends, elaborates Manager Horowitz, includes an immediate neighbor who regularly visits, the gabbai (a manager of sorts) at a local synagogue, and several beloved local DSPs they know from the Hamaspik of Rockland County Day Habilitation (Day Hab) program that they regularly attend.

At Hamaspik of Rockland

County's Arcadian Briderheim IRA, staff reports the converse.

As residents opted to enjoy their Purim at home instead of visiting friends and neighbors, friends and neighbors brought Purim right to their doorstep, and then some.

Thanks to several spirited guests, and one devoted neighbor in particular, the Purim spirit inside Arcadian was one rollicking tornado of singing and dancing, leaving the residents with hearts brimming with happiness (and a table filled with Mishloach Manos packages).

Chewing on choice

Meanwhile, at Hamaspik of Orange County's Bakertown

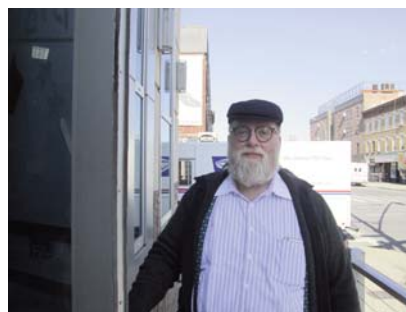
Shvesterheim "Step-down" IRA (so called for its step down in supervision), most of the residents weren't home for the holiday—leaving the *Gazette* with little to report.

Those who left chose to go to the homes of friends and family for Purim, explains Hamaspik of Rockland County Quality Assurance officer Mr. Eliezer Appel, who is also the husband of Bakertown Manager Mrs. Ruchy Appel. "That's the whole point!" he says, commenting on the choice-centered philosophy now espoused by state and federal authorities.

"It's an independent facility," adds Bakertown DSP Joseph Ergas. "They can come and go as they want." So what choices faced Bakertown residents this Purim?

"What to do with all that nosh!" Ergas jokes. ■

Purim Decision 2016



INCLUSION ARRIVES Much more than the mail shows up at Hamaspik of Kings County Day Hab's pre-Purim party, as popular singer Michael Schnitzler delivers the goods



GO AHEAD, MAKE MY DAY While Shmuel and others are casually lion around or just plain stuffed, Concord residents Nachmen and Shepsi are not to be trifled with on Purim

Thrilling Second Shabbaton for Children with Special Needs Hosted by Hamaspik

Exclusive Children's Getaway, Parental Break Broadens Agency's Community Supports



ON A ROLL A guest arrives

"Who's excited?" cheerfully calls a counselor from behind a video camera.

The lens sweeps the seats of the big yellow school bus filled with bouncing children, settling on one.

"Me!" he gleefully rejoins, joined by cheerful smiles and joyful squeals all around him.

That essentially sums up the Hamaspik of Rockland County Shabbaton to which he was recorded traveling the early afternoon of Friday, March 18.

It was a sentiment seconded in no shortage of words throughout the event—and in the voice-mail messages left with Hamaspik by grateful parents after the family-recharging event was over.

Turns out the children were hardly the only ones smiling.

The right response

Supporting children who have special needs any way you can is something Hamaspik has always done.

But supporting parents of children with special needs any way you can is also something Hamaspik has always done.

So Hamaspik simply decided to do both: Provide parents a desperately-needed full weekend of respite from caring for their precious kids, and provide a caregiving Shabbaton to those very same kids.

That was close to three months ago.

In response to the successful Shabbos respite program benefiting parents of children who attend Hamaspik of Rockland County's After-school Respite (ASR) and Day Habilitation (Day Hab) programs (and the children, too), Hamaspik did it again.

And what an event it was!

For the kids, the best part of the Shabbaton was the Motzoei Shabbos dancing to live music, according to Hamaspik of Rockland County Day Hab Women's Division Director Mrs. Esty Schonfeld, who attended as an all-around assistant. Mrs. Schonfeld reports that despite the work and minimum sleep in keeping a vigilant eye on their charges, staff still had robust reserves of strength with which to make every child included in the dancing once Shabbos was over, regardless of disability.

But over the 48 hours from Friday afternoon to Sunday morn-

ing, while their beloved children were dutifully cared for, dozens of parents were treated to a long-overdue weekend of relaxation and rejuvenation.

Laying the groundwork

At 12:00 p.m. on Friday, March 18, an impressive caravan of two full-size yellow school buses and two trademark navy-blue Hamaspik Transport Vans were seen on the highways and byways of Rockland County and North Jersey as they triumphantly made their way single-file to their destination.

That caravan came to a stop less than 90 minutes later in the early afternoon—disgoring loads of happy, bouncing kids into the parking lot of the Radisson Hotel in Piscataway, New Jersey.

Longtime Special Events Coordinator Mrs. Brenda Katina was already waiting for them at the hotel, where she had been ironing out all the last-minute logistical wrinkles that invariably pop up.

As for the children, they were already well into the upbeat, ebullient mood of the weekend, having spent the bulk of the bus ride singing camp-like songs at the behest of their enthusiastic counselors.

On hand to assist Mrs. Katina was devoted Hamaspik of Rockland County ASR Director Mrs. Raizy Landau, who works lovingly with the beautiful children of her program all year long and who treats them more like children of her own than like detached students at a day job.

Mrs. Landau had put in numer-

ous extra hours over the two weeks leading up to event, with the hard-working team leader putting in several days of overtime in the days before—seeing to it that each individual child was paired with the staff member best suited to her or him, both for daytime chaperoning and nighttime sleeping arrangements in hotel rooms.

The children were positively thrilled to see the familiar and beloved Mrs. Landau upon entering the hotel, accompanied from the buses by their diligent counselors, who had met them at their departure points to chaperone them throughout the Shabbaton event—from the very beginning to the very end.

What's more, the counselor body consisted of the entire ASR staff—giving guests a seamless and comfortable transition from their parents' arms to their counselors' care at the pickup point in Monsey on Friday at noon.

Once children had been welcomed, they were shepherd along with their luggage to their rooms, where counselors helped them unpack and settle in.

Once the kids were settled in, it was Friday-afternoon fun time: The children had the choice of making

their own name tags or getting pillows adorned with their names.

Girls could also opt for custom costume jewelry at a table covered with threadable trinkets, while the little menfolk had the opportunity to make their own keychains—and both a low-cost way to make a price-less impression.

With all that out of the way, and during all that, the children could also sample fresh Shabbos food set out during the afternoon.

By the time Shabbos candles were lit at 6:52 p.m. that evening, there already was a special atmosphere in the air. And it wasn't just Shabbos.

Royal reception

With the arrival of the Shabbos Queen, the children enjoyed the first of several programs with their counselors in one of the hotel's designated ballrooms.

Those programs, reports Mrs. Schonfeld, consisted of such exciting games and contests as bingo, memory games, team sing-alongs and more.

That program was followed by the Shabbaton's first Shabbos meal that had every young attendee feeling like royalty (which, of course,

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



DRIVEN TO PROGRESS As friends and Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) look on, Hamaspik of Kings County Men's Day Hab program participants check out the newest wheels at the New York Auto Show



BRINGING ALL VOICES TO THE TABLE Sing-along equipment is at the ready for the post-Shabbos live-music bash



PUTTING PURIM IN THE AIR As kids clap and sing, the live band electrifies the atmosphere

they are).

After the meal, during which the young guests were encouraged to help themselves to judicious and nutritious servings of each course, the children were treated the second program of the night, an interactive contest led by the team of counselors.

And if that wasn't enough, that was followed by a Shabbos party!

By the time it was over and bedtime had arrived, the children were ever-ready for bed—but ready for the excitement of the next day.

Getting up and going

Breakfast was served from 8:00 to 10:30 a.m.—available bright and early for those early-birds who tumbled out of bed first, accompanied by their counselors, and a bit later for sleepy-heads. The morning meal with a repeat of the healthy choices made available on the tables.

A lengthy free play period came next in a designated ballroom-turned-playroom, where counselors both supervised from short distances and interacted one-on-one as the children enjoyed a selection of Shabbos-appropriate games and toys brought in by Hamasplik.

That was capped by the customary Shacharis morning prayer services—followed by the reading of the Torah portion of “Zachor”. That would be a special reading of text that is traditionally attended by the entire community, including the women and children who customarily do not always attend synagogue.

By 12:00 noon, it was time for the second of the three Shabbos meals.

After that, the diminutive guests and their counselors enjoyed a lengthy rest period for relaxation, free play and socialization with peers throughout the premises.

A second Shabbos party, replete with fun and interactive songs and games, came at 3:30 p.m.

The children were then treated to rounds of board games indoors and low-impact sports outdoors, as well as another interactive group activity.

With the sun setting and the sky getting dark, it was that time of Shabbos day again for Shalosh Seudos, the third Shabbos meal. At 6:00 p.m., the children were seated once again in the dining room for a satisfying and healthy meal.

Shalosh Seudos was ushered out with an exhilarating Picture Hunt game on the premises, which had the children eagerly scouring the nooks and crannies of the game's designated spaces to find hidden paper images. Picture Hunt was capped with a grand raffle.

Shabbos officially closed with the Havdalah ceremony shortly after 8:21 p.m. But while Shabbos may have been over, the fun was only getting underway.

Purim time!

After freshening up for the evening's festivities, the children convened once again on the dining room for the Melaveh Malkah post-Shabbos meal.

With stomachs full but with hearts and souls begging for more, the guests were treated to the most exhilarating experience of the Shabbaton thus far: Live music!

Set up behind a partition for modesty purposes, a live band consisting of two singers, keyboardist and guitarist was on hand to pump merry music into the air. With the ballroom to themselves, the staff danced with joyous abandon, goading their charges to literally jump for joy along with the high-energy sound.

With the lights turned out and special stage lighting effects filling the room along with the music, the scene was one of organized chaos, as the children and counselors waved glow-in-the-dark neon wands, sang into toy microphones, sounded tambourines, clapped along and otherwise let the music carry them away for a good two hours of musical ecstasy—a perfect warm-up for the coming Purim holiday.

“She had the time of her life. You totally outdid yourselves! And the warmth and the love that the kids felt that Shabbos—it was unbelievable!” reported one deeply grateful parent in a voice mail left with Hamasplik founder and Rockland County Executive Director Meyer Wertheimer.

“The dancing motzoei Shabbos,” she continued, “how the staff danced with the guests in wheelchairs, with the kids, to give them such a great time! Unreal!”

Making the music even more exciting was its Purim theme—geared to get the children into the spirit of the upcoming holiday as it was, the guests and their chaperones alike felt like Purim had arrived a good few days early.

Understandably, by the time the kids went to bed, they were thoroughly spent, but for the best of reasons.

Closing ceremonies

Sunday morning opened with breakfast being served from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m., with guests and staff rising at their convenience.

After the morning meal, the fun still wasn't over, though: A cupcake-decorating workshop was the next exciting activity, giving the children something delicious to take home (or eat when no one was looking; but, of course, no one did that...).

And with Purim coming four days later, the Purim flame ignited the night before was kept burning with the Shabbaton's final activity: A Purim “Mishloach Manos” box making activity.

The children were given art supplies, allowing them to transform ordinary containers into custom-decorated holiday holders to their whimsical delight.

With the boxes done and the tables cleared away, it was time to head back to the rooms to pack and get ready to go.

A short while later, the children were all ready, with suitcases at hand and counselors walking them out the front door. Buses waited.

As they departed, each of the children collected a goodbye goodie bag, a little token of appreciation and not a little love from Mrs. Katina on her own behalf and behalf of the entire Hamasplik.

Still filled with exhilaration, the children bounced onto the buses, and shortly thereafter bounced into the loving arms of their fathers and mothers back home in Monsey.

Positively changed

In the days following the event, Hamasplik received several reports that the young Shabbaton guests were just not the same, and in the most positive of ways.

“I want to tell you about Yiddy's experience this Shabbos,” began the message from Mrs. Feder, Yiddy L.'s ever-grateful and devoted legal guardian, in the voice mail box of Hamasplik of Rockland County Medicaid Service Coordinator (MSC) Mrs. Bruchy Greenwald. “He came home so excited!”

Her charge was thrilled to share his new drawstring bag with all the goodies he had collected over the Shabbaton, including a pillow with his name on it. “He was so proud!”

He also shared the Mishloach Manos Purim package that he had prepared with his counselors at the event, handing it over to its intended recipients—his loving siblings.

But precious children like him weren't the only ones not the same.

The mother went on to describe the relaxation and relief afforded to herself and her entire family in being able to attend a local synagogue without the challenge of her son engaging in adverse behavior in public.

Another parent called Mr. Wertheimer to report that she initially hadn't planned to send her daughter due to preexisting plans—but that her daughter, an ASR regular, had insisted on going.

Despite it being the Wednesday before the event, the mother called Mrs. Katina to inquire about any opening. “Of course, Brenda got to work immediately and took care of it,” she reported.

“Brenda was so sensitive” to her daughter, she continued—elaborating how her daughter had been “disappointed” over not winning a game, and how Mrs. Katina later came over to the big sister, who was also a counselor, and told her that she had an extra prize for her little sister “in case you see that she's still upset... so much love and understanding on Brenda's part!”

“It was just so special! I can't thank you enough!” she exclaimed.

She also singled out Mrs. Landau for praise: “So efficient! So accommodating!”

“If you want, you can give over my message to Rabbi Wertheimer and whoever needs to hear feedback,” concluded one message. “It was a real, real treat and thank you again so, so much, and thanks for everything that you do!”

That grateful caregiver concluded: “And I hope they do it again!” ■

Emphasis on Individual Respect, Program Particulars Yields Positive Results

Hamasplik of Kings County Day Hab Executes Textbook Performance Daily

Walk into the Day Habilitation (Day Hab) center on the premises of Hamasplik of Kings County's Williamsburg complex any day, and you'll be both surprised and not surprised.

That's because, on the one hand, the meticulously-run center is marked by all the staples you'd find at any Day Hab operating under the auspices of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), Hamasplik's public-sector partner from the get-go.

No surprises there.

All entry and exit points are properly secured. Individuals are clean, happy and clearly well-stimulated. All necessary safety literature and signage is visible.

You're likely to be pleasantly surprised, though, by the level of interaction boasted by staff with the individuals they serve. These are clearly well-trained Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who take their job seriously, yet with a pleasant breeze countering the gravity of their responsibilities.

On a late February afternoon, two or three individuals are working on various educational arts and crafts projects at tables in the center's spacious multipurpose room. The earnestness and respect with which their DSPs speak of them speaks for itself.

In a front room moments later, a tall, lanky and delightfully talkative young man wastes no time introducing himself to a visitor, ensuring that the visitor is introduced to his friends as well. Everyone looks happy.

Elsewhere on the premises, an activity room is brimming with paraphernalia, decorated walls and colorful posters everywhere. If anything, the room looks like more like classroom, and a well-appointed, catalog-worthy one at that.

There is even a pair of live small pets in a corner pen; their colorful coats, calls and cuddly appearance surely round out the habilitation that beneficiaries get here every day.

If there's one thing that stands out here, it's everything: The collective sum of the details. Director of Day Services Yehudah Spangelet and his teams clearly know what they are doing.

Assistant Managers Mrs. Taub and Ms. Levy punctiliously tend to all the clockwork needed to proficiently and professionally run a Day Hab, not to mention support the people who attend. (That proficiency and professionalism earned a positive OPWDD audit result in early February.)

Day in, day out, DSPs Moshe Frankl, Meilich Gelb, Chaim Gross, Chesky Klein, Yitzchok Rosenbaum, Joseph Rubinstein and Moshe Schwartz are there to help clients realize their stated long-term habilitation outcomes.

Their Women's Division counterparts, Ms. Etengoff, Ms. Guttman, Mrs. Neuwerth, Ms. Seidenfeld, Mrs. Stein, Ms. Weingarten and Mrs. Witriol, likewise display due diligence—not to mention the genuine love and bonding that takes deep root among Hamasplik staff and beneficiaries alike.

It's dismissal time, and a Hamasplik transportation van, wheelchair lift and all, has pulled up outside to collect passengers and drive them home. Staff almost-reverentially leads the individuals outside, some pushing wheelchairs and some taking others by the hand.

Before the van's door is closed and the vehicle zips off, the group poses for a photo in the open aperture. The smiles spring forth naturally.

And at a program visibly attentive to detail, no surprise there, either. ■



HANDING OFF A DAY WELL DONE Day Hab DSP Moshe Schwartz and friend share sentiments at afternoon departure

IN THE KNOW

All about... psoriasis

If you've ever seen a friend or relative with knuckles or elbows showing a terrible red peeling rash, you may just have seen a person with psoriasis (pronounced sore-EYE-uh-sis). It may be scary-looking but it's not contagious, and with treatment, it is quite manageable.

Definition

Psoriasis is a skin disease that causes itchy or sore patches of thick, red skin with silvery scales. These patches usually show up on the outside of the elbows, the knees or scalp, or the back, face, palms and feet. However, they can also show up on other parts of the body.

Some people with psoriasis also get a form of arthritis called psoriatic arthritis.

Psoriasis usually occurs in adults. It sometimes runs in families.

Psoriasis is also an autoimmune disease, meaning, it is caused when the body's immune system attacks the body. In the case of psoriasis, the immune system attacks the skin.

Psoriasis is associated with other serious health conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease and depression.

Psoriasis is neither contagious nor infectious. It is a long-running, chronic condition.

Men and women develop psoria-

sis at equal rates. Psoriasis also occurs in all racial groups, but at varying rates. About 1.9 percent of African-Americans have psoriasis, compared to 3.6 percent of Caucasians.

Psoriasis often develops between the ages of 15 and 35, but it can develop at any age. About ten to 15 percent of those with psoriasis get it before age ten. Some infants have psoriasis, although this is considered rare.

There are generally three categories of psoriasis: Mild, moderate and severe. Mild covers less than three percent of the body. Moderate covers between three and ten percent of the body. Severe is anything over ten percent of the body.

Symptoms

Psoriasis can last a long time, even a lifetime. Symptoms come and go. Things that make them worse include infections, stress, dry skin and certain medicines. Some people report that psoriasis itches, burns and stings. Common symptoms include:

- Red patches of skin covered with silvery scales
- Small scaling spots (commonly seen in children)
- Dry, cracked skin that may bleed
- Itching, burning or soreness

- Thickened, pitted or ridged nails
- Swollen and stiff joints

Psoriasis patches can range from a few spots of dandruff-like scaling to major eruptions that cover large areas.

Diagnosis and types

Psoriasis can be hard to diagnose because it can look like other skin diseases. A skin rash that doesn't go away with over-the-counter medications should be shown at an appointment with a primary doctor.

See a doctor if the skin condition:

- Progresses beyond the nuisance stage, causing discomfort and pain
- Makes performing routine tasks difficult
- Causes concern about the appearance of the skin
- Leads to joint problems, such as pain or swelling

To properly diagnose psoriasis, your doctor might need to look at a small skin sample under a microscope.

Several types of psoriasis exist. These include:

Plaque psoriasis

The most common form, plaque psoriasis causes dry, raised, red skin lesions (plaques) covered with silvery scales. The plaques itch or may be painful and can occur anywhere on the body, including the soft tissue inside the mouth. There may be just a few plaques or many.

Nail psoriasis

Psoriasis can affect fingernails and toenails, causing pitting, abnormal nail growth and discoloration. Psoriatic nails may become loose and separate from the nail bed (onycholysis). Severe cases may cause the nail to crumble.

Scalp psoriasis

Psoriasis on the scalp appears as red, itchy areas with silvery-white

scales. The red or scaly areas often extend beyond the hairline. Patients may notice flakes of dead skin in the hair or on the shoulders, especially after scratching the scalp.

Guttate psoriasis

This primarily affects young adults and children. It's usually triggered by a bacterial infection such as strep throat. It's marked by small, water-drop-shaped sores on the trunk, arms, legs and scalp. The sores are covered by a fine scale and aren't thick as typical plaques are. Patients may have a single outbreak that goes away on its own, or may have repeated episodes.

Other, less common, types of psoriasis are inverse, pustular, erythrodermic and psoriatic arthritis.

Cause

While scientists currently do not yet know what exactly causes psoriasis, they do know that the immune system and genetics play major roles in its development. A problem with the immune system causes psoriasis. In a process called cell turnover, skin cells that grow deep in the skin rise to the surface. Normally, this takes a month. In psoriasis, it happens in just days because the cells rise too fast.

Treatment

Psoriasis treatments can be divided into three main types: topical treatments (creams), light therapy and medications.

The primary goal of treatment is to stop the skin cells from growing so quickly. While there isn't yet a cure, psoriasis treatments may offer significant relief. Lifestyle measures, such as using a nonprescription cortisone cream and exposing the skin to small amounts of natural sunlight, also may improve psoriasis symptoms.

Psoriasis treatments aim to stop the skin cells from growing so quickly, which reduces inflammation and plaque formation; and remove

scales and smooth the skin, which is particularly true of topical treatments that the patient applies to the skin.

Topical treatments

Used alone, creams and ointments applied to the skin can effectively treat mild to moderate psoriasis. When disease is more severe, creams are likely to be combined with oral medications or light therapy. Topical psoriasis treatments include:

Topical corticosteroids—powerful anti-inflammatory drugs that slow cell turnover by suppressing the immune system, which reduces inflammation and relieves associated itching.

Vitamin D analogues—synthetic forms of vitamin D such as prescription Dovonex or Rocaltrol that slow down the growth of skin cells.

Anthralin—a medication believed to normalize DNA activity in skin cells. Anthralin (Dritho-Scalp) also can remove scale, making the skin smoother. However, anthralin can irritate skin, and it stains virtually anything it touches, including skin, clothing, countertops and bedding. That's why doctors often recommend washing the cream off the skin after a brief time.

Topical retinoids—prescription creams like Tazorac and Avage, developed specifically for the treatment of psoriasis. Like other vitamin A derivatives, these normalize DNA activity in skin cells and may decrease inflammation. The most common side effect is skin irritation.

Calcineurin inhibitors—prescription creams like Prograf and Elidel are approved only for the treatment of atopic dermatitis, but studies have shown them to be effective at times in the treatment of psoriasis. They are thought to disrupt the activation of T cells.

Salicylic acid—available in over-the-counter and prescription forms, including medicated shampoos and other combos, salicylic

Readers Write

In recent weeks, several readers wrote in regarding psoriasis, prompting this article.

One reader testifies that apple cider vinegar, diluted with a bit of water and rubbed on to affected areas (or even imbibed), cured her of psoriasis.

A second reader writes that, at least in her own family's experience, exposure to the unique environment of the Dead Sea produced "wonderful results" in "eliminating" psoriasis. "But I

don't know if buying salt products here will work," she adds, "or if the 'Dead Sea effect' works for everyone."

Finally, two readers wrote that the diet plan espoused by one Dr. Pagano worked for them.

While the *Gazette* takes no responsibility for these claims, we do wish to share these reported experiences with you.

As with all decisions regarding medical care, consult with your physician first. ■

acid helps shed dead skin cells and reduces scaling

Coal tar—a thick, black byproduct of the manufacture of petroleum products and coal, coal tar is probably the oldest treatment for psoriasis. It reduces scaling, itching and inflammation.

Moisturizers—these won't heal psoriasis by themselves but they can reduce itching and scaling; they can help combat the dryness that results from other therapies.

Light therapy (phototherapy)

The simplest and easiest form of phototherapy involves exposing the skin to controlled amounts of natural sunlight. Brief, daily exposures to small amounts of sunlight may improve psoriasis, but intense sun exposure can worsen symptoms and cause skin damage. Before beginning a sunlight regimen, ask your doctor about the safest way to use natural sunlight for psoriasis treatment.

Other forms of light therapy include artificial ultraviolet A (UVA), ultraviolet B (UVB) light either alone or in combination with medications.

Ultraviolet (UV) light is a wavelength of light in a range too short for the human eye to see. When exposed to UV rays in sunlight or artificial light, the activated T cells in the skin die. This slows skin cell turnover and reduces scaling and inflammation.

Controlled doses of UVB light from an artificial light source, called UVB phototherapy, may improve mild to moderate psoriasis symptoms. This therapy, also called broadband UVB, can be used to treat single patches, widespread psoriasis and psoriasis that resists topical treatments.

A newer type of psoriasis treatment called narrow band UVB therapy may be more effective than broadband UVB treatment. It's usually administered two or three times a week until the skin improves, then maintenance may require only weekly sessions.

Some doctors combine UVB treatment and coal tar treatment, which is known as Goeckerman therapy. The two therapies together are more effective than either alone

because coal tar makes skin more receptive to UVB light. Once requiring a three-week hospital stay, a modification of the original treatment can be performed in a doctor's office.

Other forms of light therapy include photochemotherapy or psoralen plus ultraviolet A (PUVA), which uses a light-sensitizing medication (psoralen) taken before exposure to UVA light and is often used for more-severe cases of psoriasis; and excimer laser, which uses a controlled UVB beam of a specific wavelength for mild to moderate psoriasis directly on the involved skin.

Medications

For severe or treatment-resistant psoriasis, a doctor may prescribe oral or injected drugs. Because of severe side effects, some of these medications are used for only brief periods and may be alternated with other forms of treatment. These include:

Retinoids—a group of drugs that may reduce the production of skin cells in severe psoriasis that doesn't respond to other therapies. Retinoids usually must be avoided by young mothers.

Methotrexate—an oral medication that decreases production of skin cells, suppresses inflammation, and may also slow the progression of psoriatic arthritis in some people.

Cyclosporine—an immunosuppressant similar to methotrexate that can increase risk of infection and other grave health problems.

Other medications include drugs for moderate to severe psoriasis that alter the immune system, like Enbrel, Remicade, Humira and Stelara, or Droxia and Hydrea, two medications that can be used when other drugs can't.

Prognosis

Coping with psoriasis can be a challenge, especially if the disease covers large areas of the body or is in places readily seen by other people, such as the face or hands. The ongoing, persistent nature of the disease and the treatment challenges only add to the burden.

Here are some ways to help patients cope and feel more secure:

New Hope for Eventual Autism Tracking Technology for Nation's Communities

Sen. Charles Schumer's New Bipartisan Senate Bill Revives Avonte's Law

New York's very own Sen. Charles "Chuck" Schumer, sponsor of early 2014's Avonte's Law, is working for families affected by autism again.

The new version of that Senate bill, this one dubbed Kevin and Avonte's Law, would—if passed—designate taxpayer funds from an existing federal Alzheimer's program for the distribution of electronic tracking devices for individuals prone to wandering or flight.

Kevin and Avonte's Law of 2016 was introduced by Sen. Schumer on March 1.

Working with Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), Schumer incorporated his 2014 bill into broader legislation addressing both Alzheimer's and other disabilities. The new legislation would reauthorize the federal government's spending of taxes on the existing Alzheimer's program—and increase it by over \$1 million.

The original authorization earmarked \$750,000 for the personal tracking devices. Kevin and Avonte's Law ups that by \$1.25 million, for a total of \$2 million.

Should the bill pass and collect the President's signature, the U.S. Dept. of Justice would then distribute funding grants to state and local law enforcement agencies that apply.

The grants would cover those agencies' costs of purchasing the wearable technology and then advertising in local communities of the program's availability. They would also pay for training.

While the \$2 million in the new bill is far less than the \$10 million originally requested in the 2014 Avonte's Law, it is said to have a

better chance of passing than its predecessor because of its support by Sen. Grassley.

The Heartland Republican chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee, which would hear the bill; Grassley's grassroots involvement is likely to expedite its movement towards the White House.

The original Avonte's Law was named for the late Avonte Oquendo, a 14-year-old Queens, New York public school student with non-verbal autism and a tendency to bolt. In October of 2013, young Mr. Oquendo ran out of his school building through an open side door and vanished.

His remains were found 11 miles away from the school in January of 2014, after months of publicity and searching, on the shore of the East River, where he is believed to have drowned shortly after disappearing.

*

Sen. Schumer's initial actions were spurred by New York City's own Avonte's Law, which was unanimously approved by the City Council and signed by Mayor Bill de Blasio over the summer of 2014.

That law calls for the installation of alarms on public-school exit doors to instantly alert staff that a student may have bolted. Avonte Oquendo went missing after inattentive staff was later found to have allowed the flight-prone youngster to flee through the unsupervised side door.

As passed, the law required the New York City Dept. of Education (DOE) to review the city's entire school system and determine whether facilities needed the installing of outside door alarms to

ensure student safety.

That's a key change from original language requiring across-the-board alarm installations on every school-building outside door.

The DOE's citywide facilities evaluation, which concluded in May of 2015, covered all elementary schools as well as the District 75 schools that serve students with special needs.

In early June of 2015, the city announced at a City Hall press conference that all but 34 of its 1,263 school buildings will have received the alarms by the end of 2015. "We want to reaffirm for everyone that student safety is our first priority," said DOE Deputy Chancellor of Operations Elizabeth Rose at the conference.

By December of 2015, over 21,000 alarms—at a cost of \$5.5 million—had been installed by Maximum Security Incorporated, the winning contractor, on the school buildings' secondary doors. Main entrances are monitored by school safety personnel.

Citywide school staff has also been trained on how to respond should the special door alarms go off, and has been given additional training on working with students who have special needs.

Hamaspik has long implemented proactive measures to protect those individuals with autism who resides in its Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA) homes. These measures include alarmed front doors, one-on-one Direct Support Professional (DSP) caregivers, and even a private non-shared bedroom for one individual with high-risk flight tendencies. ■

Get educated. Find out as much as you can about the disease and research your treatment options. Understand possible triggers of the disease, so you can better prevent flare-ups. Educate those around you, including family and friends, so they can recognize, acknowledge

and support your efforts in dealing with the disease.

Follow your doctor's recommendations. If your doctor recommends certain treatments and lifestyle changes, be sure to follow them. Ask questions if anything is unclear.

Find a support group. Consider joining a support group with other members who have the disease and know what you're going through. You may find comfort in sharing

your experience and struggles and meeting people who face similar challenges. Ask your doctor for information on psoriasis support groups in your area or online. ■

Hamaspik thanks Joseph Sutton, M.D. F.A.A.D., Board Certified Dermatologist with the Suffer-based Schweiger Dermatology Group, for critically reviewing this article.

Hamaspik Day Habs Advance Happiness Theme of Adar Month at Joint Pre-Purim Party

Orange, Rockland County Programs Unite for Holiday Spirit, Interaction



SOMETHING FISHY
Live goldfish and fish-shaped cookies liven up each party table

There's no better way to prepare for Purim than with a pre-Purim party.

A d a r was definitely in the air this past Monday, March 21st, as the

young women who regularly attend Hamaspik of Rockland County's Day Habilitation (Day Hab) program hosted their Orange County counterparts at an exciting get-together in Monsey.

The joint event, held at Hamaspik of Rockland County headquarters on Rt. 59, invoked all the familiar parts of the joyous festival: Masquerades, music and the Mishloach Manos food gifts.

Arriving in full Purim costumes before the official 12:30 p.m. start, the two-dozen-plus individuals from

upstate Kiryas Joel, home to Hamaspik of Orange County, were gleefully greeted along with their support staff.

The get-together carried the theme of fish—the symbol of the Jewish-calendar Adar month in which Purim falls. Partygoers thus baked fish-shaped cookies and played a game in which players had to say something "fishy."

The party also treated participants to face painting, a fresh and healthy lunch (with health foods including salads for those on diets)

and plenty of socializing.

The guests were also all too happy to share a favorite dance routine with their hosts—and with lively music pouring from a sound system set up for the party, participants and staff joined hands for 45 minutes of lively footwork accompanied by plenty of singing along.

But the apex of the event, which was jointly planned by Women's Division Managers Mrs. Schonfeld (Rockland) and Mrs. Niederman (Orange) two weeks prior, was a repeat appearance by Mr. Shmuli Perkel and his interactive Musical

IQ percussion workshop.

Using the interactive activity's numerous hand drums, Mr. Perkel once again had his Hamaspik crowd learning and/or reinforcing musical timing—not to mention gaining improved fine-motor and artistic-expression skills.

Participants came away musically and emotionally charged for the upcoming Purim holiday—and with a renewed sense of bonding and sisterhood.

"We joined them for Chanukah," says Mrs. Schonfeld. "It was nice to have them for Purim." ■

'Support, not Care' of People with Disabilities

Continued from cover

In what's known industry-wide as the medical model, disabilities are (or were) seen as a problem that needs a solution. The support model largely turns that on its head.

The support model posits that people with disabilities aren't "broken" and don't need to be "fixed."

As a matter of fact, the new approach largely posits that disabilities not be recognized in the first place, much as a person with full mental function and, say, partial paralysis, like Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, is fully embraced and integrated. Gov. Abbott uses a wheelchair and lives a full life, one of the country's few state chief executives to serve despite significant disability. (Perhaps the first was New York's very own Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the WWII-era U.S. President and polio survivor who served as Governor from 1929 to 1932 despite using a wheelchair.)

Under the support model, individuals are to be supported by their immediate circle—and granted the fullest possible freedom of choice to the extent practicable.

Professional values

To realize its new goal of transforming its statewide philosophy, the

OPWDD tapped the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) to create and execute a retraining curriculum.

Led by disability industry veteran Joseph "Joe" MacBeth, who personally leads many of his organization's training consultations, the NADSP is currently in the process of bringing the state agency—and all its partner non-profits like HamaspiK—up to speed.

HamaspiK's first encounter with the NADSP and the OPWDD's new approach towards disability actually occurred last year, when Mr. MacBeth led a first training on the premises of HamaspiK of Rockland County. That day-long introductory session was geared for the agency's entire command hierarchy, including its Executive Directors.

As spring sprung this year, HamaspiK's second session had about three dozen front-line managers from across the agency spend the day with the NADSP for an informative presentation.

Present for the day-long training were directors of HamaspiK's group residences, Day Habilitation (Day Hab) programs and Community Habilitation (Com Hab) programs.

Unlike last year's introductory session, this year's NADSP was focused on imparting credentialed

skills and training, via the aforementioned managers, to HamaspiK's front-line Direct Support Professionals (DSPs).

Those would be the men and women serving as the OPWDD's collective hands and heart and who, until the start of this sea change a relatively short time ago, were known as Direct Care Workers (DCWs).

Specifically, HamaspiK's February training session with the NADSP was geared towards bringing agency DSPs up to speed in the OPWDD's Code of Ethics for Direct Support Professionals, a nine-part code developed by the NADSP that lays out modern DSPs' dos and don'ts.

A Code of Competence

The first and perhaps most-critical rule is the first: Person-Centered Support.

Elaborating on this, the Code states: "As a DSP, my first allegiance is to the person I support; all other activities and functions I perform flow from this allegiance."

The Code calls for the DSP's every direct interaction to be informed by that outlook with such language as "Honor the personality, preferences, culture and gifts of people who cannot speak by seeking

other ways of understanding them," and "Provide advocacy when the needs of the system override those of the individual(s) I support."

The remaining components of the code are centered on such staples as promoting physical and emotional wellbeing, maintaining integrity, responsibility and confidentiality, respect, self-determination, and advocacy.

The Code also includes assisting the people whom the DSP supports in developing and maintaining their own personal relationships, free of the DSP's personal beliefs or impressions.

The newest frontier

"Competency + Ethics = Outcomes: Creating a Culture of Competency" was the daylong event's official title.

And working interactively with an involved and spirited crowd, the NADSP instructors first walked their captive audience through the "The Emerging Roles and Expectations of the Direct Support Workforce," an opening session that dwelt upon how to best support people with disabilities to make informed decisions.

That was followed by a series of real-life scenarios that reflect the new values of equality, freedom and personal choice.

The presentation used short videos and electronic slides throughout, not to mention a series of

impressively in-tune cultural nuances reflecting Orthodox community culture and sensitivities.

Real-examples involving such religious-life staples as chulent, the beloved traditional Shabbos stew, or the nighttime Maariv prayer services, were more than a little amusing to the crowd—but indicative of the NADSP's dedication to speaking its audiences' language and getting the job done right.

The first of two afternoon sessions explained the OPWDD's new Core Competencies, a standardized set of guidelines that inform and define professional DSP behavior and skills. The Core Competencies, in which all New York State DSPs will eventually need to be credentialed and regularly recertified, was adopted by the OPWDD with NADSP assistance.

"You're not a parent," HamaspiK of Rockland County Director of Quality Assurance Eliezer ("Lazer") Appel later said to the *Gazette*, summing up the training's overarching message of replacing care of individuals with disabilities with support. "You're a friend."

HamaspiK has long incorporated a genuine love and caring for the individuals it serves in its regular programming.

With the new training, that love and caring are poised to move up to the next new level. ■

At a HamaspiK 'Brothers Home' in Rockland County, a Song for a Brother

In Shira Choir's First Visit, Pro Vocal Ensemble Lends Voice to Fraternity

Naftali Horowitz loves music.

At any HamaspiK or even non-HamaspiK event at which he's present, he's likeliest to be found in front of the bandstand, in thrall to the music—absorbing, enjoying and usually waving his hands about in time to the live audible artistry.

Naftali is also a resident of HamaspiK of Rockland County's Wannamaker Briderheim Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA), the agency's youngest group home.

Along with his seven peers, Naftali calls Wannamaker home—using the facility as a springboard from which to make the most informed and person-centered choices that people with disabilities have perhaps ever been empowered to make in modern history.

Wannamaker, and all IRA homes under the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities like it, is anything but our parents' institutions.

Taken seriously as his requests are, then, it was a few weeks ago that Naftali, music in his blood as it is, began talking about getting a visit

from his own brother.

Turns out he isn't the only Horowitz with music in his blood—Joel Horowitz, professional vocalist, is also the vocal choreographer for the Shira Choir community a cappella ensemble.

In early March, brother to brother, Joel Horowitz was asked to visit

residents often in opposite moods were both in same spirits at the same time.

From 4:00 to 5:30 p.m., the young men sang and danced as they were indulged in a private concert of their own, with the professional vocalists, and accompanying keyboardist, rolling out one classic after another.

At the center of most of it, and standing on a chair to direct proceedings for a good part of it, was a clearly enthused Naftali Horowitz. Mr. Horowitz was, needless to say, thrilled to not just introduce his brother to his, well, brothers, but to announce their song choices, too.

Video clips taken during the proceedings and viewed by the *Gazette* two days later show male bonding at its healthiest—a bunch of buddies jumping up and down to their favorite tunes.

Some dozen melodies and 90 minutes later, Shira (which means song) left.

But the music—and the harmony—remained, lingering in the air long after the last note. ■



PERFECT HARMONY The Shira Choir and friends

the Briderheim.

On Monday, March 7, Joel Horowitz and five brothers in song showed up.

For a good chunk of a lovely early-spring afternoon, Wannamaker was on its feet.

Wannamaker manager Joel Horowitz (not to be confused with Joel Horowitz) even reports that two

Matzah Bakery

Continued from cover

matzah bakeries begin mixing ingredients and rapidly baking them on site around Chanukah time.

Months later, with huge stocks of matzah ready for the seasonal demand, and preparations for Pesach (Passover) in high gear, matzah bakeries are beehives of activity.

It was into this world of regimented chaos that the gentlemen of the Men's Division of the HamaspiK of Rockland County Day Habilitation (Day Hab) program stepped on a late-February morning.

Being part of the machine

Synchronicity, precision and timing are all critical to the operation of a kosher matzah bakery.

The central cog around which all bakery clockwork turns is an essential fact of culinary physics: Dough rises in 18 minutes.

To thus prevent any freshly-mixed dough from rising and turning into heaven (that is, any dough completing that natural process, a Bible-sized no-no come Passover), bakery workers rush hand-mixed dough from mixing pot to rolling tables to long insertion rods to wood-fired ovens in under 18 minutes.

The visitors from HamaspiK were graciously granted the opportunity to see the workstations firsthand and up-close, with several even wielding the yards-long spatulas to extract the freshly-baked crackers

from the oven from a safe distance.

A good hour later, with the gentlemen having made their rounds of the premises and even posing for several photos, the group headed back to HamaspiK's Day Hab center.

Community acclimation

Passover may have been just under two months away at the time of their visit, Mr. Knopfler noted in his program's weekly newsletter—but not far away enough to preclude a preparatory excursion.

"We're thinking ahead and getting ready," Knopfler wrote, "with less than 60 days left until we're seated at the Seder table."

Community acclimation has long been a central value at HamaspiK that dates back to its very founding. The agency was created in 1986 to give members of the community affected by disability the maximum access to their benefits, and the opportunity to maximize their abilities, in environments in which they are most comfortable.

Fast-forward three decades, and that value dovetails perfectly with the contemporary value of providing support, not "care"—and of putting the individual and his or her personal and communal culture at the center of that support.

In continuing its commitment to person-centered and value-centered support, such as not just providing proper IRA group-home Seders but also exposing individuals to the communal infrastructure making possible those Seders, HamaspiK is doing just that. ■

In Newest National Cancer 'Moonshot,' Biden Aims to Demolish Research Silos

Isolation, Non-communication Seen by VP as Chief Hurdles to New Cures



LIFTOFF As part of an ongoing "listening tour," U.S. Vice President Joe Biden has been visiting academic and government cancer research centers nationwide—including the University of Pennsylvania (with NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins)—since the moonshot's launch

For U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, this time it's personal.

As it turns out, the Vice President's "moonshot" to cure cancer is hardly the first U.S. effort to finally cure the dread disease once and for all.

The phrase, borrowed from U.S. President John F. Kennedy's 1960s call to put a man on the moon, invokes a rush of combined research forces to solve the riddle of curing cancer, much as top experts in several fields put their heads together to put Neil Armstrong's boots on the moon.

The first time "moonshot" was used to invoke a concentrated joint effort to cure cancer was U.S. President Richard Nixon's 1971 declaration of "war on cancer," a war nowhere near over today.

That year saw Nixon spearhead the passage of the National Cancer Act, whose funding prompted the prediction that medical research and technology would cure cancer within six years.

Several other "moonshots" followed over the ensuing decades.

But some 45 years, billions in research and hundreds of thousands of losses later, Joe Biden is spearheading the latest cancer moonshot—driven by the loss of his beloved son Beau, who died last year of brain cancer at age 46, and the resulting outpouring of apolitical support.

*

So what's different this time around?

Cynics and critics have harped on the "moonshot" phrase, and the resulting research efforts, almost since the beginning, variously calling them politically charged, emo-

tionally manipulative, misplaced, misguided or misdirected, driven by lobbyists, or any combination thereof. Many have pointed out that heart disease kills more Americans than cancer.

Regardless, Vice President Biden has set out to put his own spin on the government's latest cancer moonshot.

Spurred on by a dramatic call to research action by President Barack Obama at a high moment of his last State of the Union Address, Biden—who gave the President a thumbs-up in response to his off-script question, "What do you say, Joe?"—is focusing on the sharing of research.

One perhaps-unfortunate fact in the field of cancer research, or in any field of research, for that matter, is the confluence of competition, copy-righting and intellectual property—not to mention profitability.

Any number of research facilities, whether taxpayer-funded and part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or other federal bodies, private-sector, non-profit or academic, are working independently in numerous corners of cancer research at any given time.

Thus, any key development or discovery by any single such entity, especially one profit-driven, is likely to remain in its vertical "silo" of research and development, rather than be shared across the horizon with all other cancer research entities.

It is these silos that Joe Biden is seeking to tear down—allowing vital cancer information to eventually flow freely, be shared openly, and potentially save lives.

*

While the President made the

newest U.S. cancer moonshot call in his Jan. 11 State of the Union Address, Vice President Joe Biden had actually made his the previous October.

"Tonight, I'm announcing a new national effort to get it done. And because he's gone to the mat for all of us, on so many issues over the past forty years, I'm putting Joe in charge of Mission Control," said Obama to raucous applause. "For the loved ones we've all lost, for the family we can still save, let's make America the country that cures cancer once and for all."

However, the week before that call, Biden's staff had met at the White House with a number of groups, including teams with the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) and the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), to discuss current cancer research and funding.

And on Friday, January 29, less than three weeks after Obama's final State of the Union, Biden visited the Perelman School of Medicine and the Abramson Cancer Center in Philadelphia, where he led a round-table discussion with some 200 scientists to officially launch his moonshot.

The round-table dwelt on the hoarding of information in the research community and industry—a territorialism that the Vice President's campaign hopes to undo by encouraging more sharing.

But AACR and ASCO already have research-sharing mechanisms.

Both AACR's Genomics, Evidence, Neoplasia, Information, Exchange (GENIE) project and ASCO CancerLinQ initiative were discussed at the White House meet-

ing with Biden staffers.

And the federal government is actually in the midst of another cancer moonshot, and one launched at last year's State of the Union Address, to boot.

That would be the NIH's Precision Medicine Initiative, a \$215 million "Big Data" project that is now collecting medical records, biopsies, data from smartphones or wearable sensor devices, and information about diet, substance abuse, and disease symptoms from volunteers. The NIH estimates it will take up to four years to reach the one-million volunteer goal for the study.

What's more, the NCI spent \$90 billion on cancer research and treatment between 1971 and 2014, according to a 2014 investigation by Chicago Health—which also found that about 260 U.S. nonprofits spend an additional \$2.2 billion on cancer research each year.

*

So is another moonshot what's needed? Maybe.

There's already plenty of cancer research going on. President Barack Obama's final budget for Fiscal Year 2017, released on February 11, 2016, contains \$755 million in requests for cancer research.

That \$755 million would join another \$195 million in new cancer funds that Congress approved in December—bringing the total cost for Vice President Biden's moon shot to nearly \$1 billion.

With Obama lending his stamp of approval to his second-in-command's personal cancer moonshot, Vice President Joe Biden joins the ranks of U.S. leaders who have rolled out new battles in the "War on Cancer," including, besides

Nixon himself, Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. And in a notably bold declaration, former NCI director (2002-2006) Andrew von Eschenbach launched a moonshot in 2003 that all but called for the complete eradication of cancer by 2015.

On the private-sector side of the cancer-research industry, the leading MD Anderson Cancer Center of Houston, Texas launched a moonshot in 2012.

And on January 11, 2016, the same day of the President's final State of the Union, California billionaire and oncologist Patrick Soon-Shiong, whom Biden consulted, announced an industry-led moonshot aimed at testing combinations of cancer immunotherapy drugs.

However, the NIH's pre-Biden cancer-research budget is already \$5.3 billion. And cancer, despite all the grandiose and bellicose declarations against it, remains a complex disease that experts consider a set of more than 200 diseases.

But the Vice President, long admired as a scrappy survivor who soldiers on despite it all, remains optimistic.

"My hope is that I can be a catalyst," Biden said at the Philadelphia event. "To oversimplify it: To get everybody on the same page." ■



MOTIVATION
Beau Biden, 1969-2015

Biden Moonshot Names Blue-ribbon Panel

Monday, April 4 marked the next major development in Vice President Joe Biden's moonshot cancer initiative, as the Obama administration announced the 28 members of its blue-ribbon advisory committee.

The two-dozen-plus committee members, all leading cancer experts and patient advocates, will be advising the federal government on how to best to tackle some of the most promising but challenging areas in cancer research today. The panel will serve as a working group of the National Cancer Advisory Board (NCAB), which advises the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

The committee's first recommendations are expected in August, and will be used by the

inter-agency cancer moonshot task force being led by Vice President Biden's office.

In a statement the same time, Biden said the blue-ribbon group will ensure that his group's decisions "will be grounded in the best science."

The new committee has three chairs: Tyler Jacks, a cancer biologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who also chairs the NCAB; Elizabeth Jaffe, an expert in immunology at Johns Hopkins University; and Dinah Singer, an acting deputy director of the cancer institute.

Curiously, billionaire California entrepreneur Patrick Soon-Shiong, who is funding his own cancer moonshot, is also a committee member. ■

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The AUTISM UPDATE

News and developments from the world of research and advocacy

Eye-tracking tech detects autism: study

A study by the respected Cleveland Clinic found that eye-tracking technology was able to correctly determine most of which at-risk children had autism by measuring the amount of time they spent focusing on small objects.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, was able to correctly determine autism in 80 percent of kids already deemed high-risk and between ages three and eight.

Autism is currently diagnosed with a battery of tests; researchers believe that with faster and earlier diagnoses with new methods such as eye tracking, children with autism could be diagnosed—and given effective interventions—earlier.

Adults with ASD going to ERs, hospitals more

A study in the April issue of the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* finds that individuals with autism ages 22 to 64 accounted for 2,549 per 100,000 emergency-room admissions in 2006. That figure skyrocketed to 6,087 per 100,000 admissions by 2011.

The biggest chunk of ER visits from adults with autism, 24 percent, was related to injury, the study found. Another 15 percent of visits were due to psychiatric issues while another 16 percent stemmed from non-psychiatric disorders like cancer, diabetes or epilepsy.

In cases where adults with autism visited the emergency room, researchers noted that they were more likely to be admitted to the hospital as compared to other patients. What's more, average charges for visits from those on the spectrum were 2.3 times higher.

New backpack for kids with ASD

The newly-launched Nesel Pack may look like any ordinary school backpack.

But take a closer look, and you'll see features designed exclusively for children who have an autism spectrum disorder.

Some of them are obvious. Some will have to be pointed out to you.

And all are designed to give wearers a school bag they can feel comfortable wearing and nestle into—hence the new product's name.

The Nesel Pack features shoulder straps designed to make the student feel hugged, for starters.

Clips for parents to easily attach

chew toys or other sensory tools for their children come standard.

A slot for a name card, allowing for easy identification in the event of child wandering or flight, is prominently featured.

For safety purposes, a handle is affixed to its back, giving caregivers an extra measure of security in the event of children bolting.

The backpack also offers pouches for electronics—as well as for weights that mimic the sensory-stimulation and compression vests that benefit many kids with autism.

The Nesel Pack was created by six students at the University of Minnesota's Entrepreneurship in Action class, who met with hundreds of autism parents, OTs, teachers and leaders to design and create a prototype.

Working with Fraser, Minnesota's largest autism-services provider, the team eventually produced a final product now being manufactured by Battle Lake Outdoors.

The Nesel Pack retails for \$115. Not surprisingly, it comes in only one color: blue.

Autism woes across the pond

A British report on parents of children with autism found that only 11 percent report satisfaction with the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) treatment provided by professionals with the National Health Service (NHS), Britain's woe-ridden public medicine program.

The report, based on a 2014 survey by British charity Treating Autism, finds that 61 percent of parents reported that there was no understanding of their concerns over issues facing their child. A majority of respondents, 70 percent, reported that they had been told that physical symptoms were due to autism, implying that they did not warrant further investigation.

The U.K. is home today to an

estimated 600,000 people living with ASD, or one out of every 108 people in a total population of some 65 million.

The U.S., for its part, is home to an estimated one out of every 68 children with an autism spectrum disorder, according to current CDC statistics. A number of beneficial treatments, including the recently-developed applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy, must be covered by insurance companies in several states, including New York.

Rare autism treatment developing

A team of scientists at the Lieber Institute for Brain Development, an independent lab affiliated with Baltimore's Johns Hopkins Medical Center, is working on a possible new treatment for Pitt-Hopkins syndrome, a rare form of autism with only 500 confirmed cases.

The team will be testing a drug normally used to treat pain, giving it to patients to see if it corrects the interruptions in normal brain-cell activity that cause Pitt-Hopkins.

Kids autism rate still one in 68: CDC

According to new data released on March 31 by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the autism rate among school-aged children has stayed at one in 68 kids.

The CDC gets its numbers from monitoring autism among eight-year-olds in 11 communities in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah and Wisconsin.

"What we know for sure is that there are many children living with autism who need services and support now and as they grow into adolescence and adulthood," said Dr. Stuart Shapira, chief medical officer

CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, in an agency news release.

According to Dr. Ron Marino, associate chair of pediatrics at Winthrop-University Hospital in Mineola, New York, the steady numbers since 2010 "probably reflects the fact that screening methods... are identifying the correct number of children."

Agency researchers behind the new numbers also found that only 43 percent of children identified with autism receive developmental evaluations by age three, suggesting that many kids with autism may not be identified as early as they could be.

"The most powerful tool we have right now to make a difference in the lives of children with (autism) is early identification," said Dr. Shapira.

The CDC report was published March 31 in the agency's journal, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

"A" is for "April Autism Awareness!"

The annual National Autism Awareness Month is being held again this April.

Created by the Autism Society some 25 years ago, the awareness month is "a nationwide effort to promote autism awareness, inclusion and self-determination for all" throughout the month of April, "and assure that each person with ASD is provided the opportunity to achieve the highest possible quality of life," according to an Autism Society statement.

The Autism Society is focusing this year on mainstream acceptance, inclusion and appreciation.

National Autism Awareness Month is celebrated by Presidential and Congressional declarations, events and activities both local and online, and partner opportunities.

The Autism Society also encourages people to show their

support for people with autism by wearing the Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon as a lapel pin or even car magnet.

What's more, April 2 is World Autism Awareness Day.

This past April 2, 2016, thousands of landmarks, businesses, houses of worship, and communities in more than 147 countries joined Autism Speaks to mark the seventh annual Light It Up Blue campaign and raise global awareness of autism spectrum disorder.

"On World Autism Awareness Day, we reaffirm our dedication to ensuring that belief is a reality for all those who live on the autism spectrum," declared U.S. President Barack Obama in a White House proclamation on April 2. "I encourage all Americans to learn more about autism and what they can do to support individuals on the autism spectrum and their families."

Fungicides trigger autism-related gene changes in mice

The brain cells of mice exposed to a new class of fungicides showed changes in gene expression similar to those found in individuals with autism other neurological conditions, according to the results of a new study.

To reach their findings, researchers exposed the brain cells, or neurons, of mice to around 300 chemicals, including a variety of fungicides—chemicals that can prevent or kill the growth of fungi, protecting plants and crops from fungi-related damage.

The researchers pinpointed which genes might be affected by exposure to the chemicals, comparing them with neurons that were not exposed to the chemicals.

Using computer programs, the team was able to establish which chemicals triggered similar changes in gene expression.

The researchers identified six groups of chemicals that altered gene expression within mouse neurons, including several existing pesticides and a new fungicide.

While the researchers say the findings cannot confirm that the chemicals cause such conditions in humans, they believe further investigation is warranted.

The University of North Carolina (UNC) School of Medicine study was published recently in *Nature Communications*.



EMBRACING AUTISM FROM ALL SIDES The specialty Nesel Pack, designed from scratch with schoolkids on the spectrum in mind, features hug-like shoulder straps and weight pouches



1. Cyber authorities warn hospitals about growing "ransomware" threat

In early April, cybersecurity agencies in the U.S. and Canada issued an alert about the growing number of "ransomware" computer virus attacks deliberately targeting the computer systems used by hospitals and other healthcare organizations.

In March 2016 alone, five such organizations reported being hit by "ransomware," or malicious code that locks computer systems and demands the electronic transfer of substantial sums to foreign accounts in exchange for the software's "keys."

According to an April 4 joint statement from the Pittsburgh-based Computer Emergency Readiness Team (CERT) and the Canadian Cyber Incident Response Center (CCIRC), ransomware first appeared on the criminal horizon in 2012.

Since then, a number of ransomware variants have proliferated, encrypting not just single infected computers but entire shared networks—rendering files containing sensitive patient data useless and inaccessible until perpetrators collect a ransom.

Most of the ransoms, if paid, are transferred via bitcoins, a form of largely untraceable online currency.

In February, for example, Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center in Los Angeles paid a \$17,000 ransom to release a virus that had its computer systems compromised for over a week. Three other California hospitals were hit with similar ransomware attacks in March.

Experts warn hospital staff to be wary of e-mails with attachments, as well as any electronic or phone requests for the detailed hospital information that cyber-criminals first need as groundwork for their targeted theft.

In related news, an FBI agent will be the keynote speaker at an April 19 event on cyber risk in the health care industry hosted by consulting firm Aon Risk Solutions. The event will also feature a panel of experts on the subject.

2. New York takes place(s) on Top 50 list

New York State takes the most places on *Modern Healthcare's* 2016 listing of the 50 most influential physician executives and leaders nationwide.

While U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Robert Califf tops the list, Montefiore Medical Center CEO Steven Safyer takes #13. The 24th spot is snagged by NYC Health and Hospitals President and CEO Ram Raju, followed by Commonwealth Fund President David Blumenthal (#35), Mount Sinai Health System President and CEO Kenneth Davis (#39) and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center President and CEO Craig Thompson (#45).

3. Crain's publishes annual list of highest-paid New York hospital employees

Long Island's North Shore-LIJ Health System, recently renamed Northwell Health, figures strongly on the list of top-paid hospital executives and employees recently published by authoritative New York news outlet *Crain's*.

Northwell Health President and Chief Executive Michael Dowling received a \$6.5 million supplemental executive retirement plan, or SERP, payment upon turning 65, triggering a one-time salary surge. Dowling's \$9.6 million total compensation—*Crain's* second-highest figure ever awarded to an individual on the publication's top-paid hospital exec list—reflects the challenge of overseeing a complicated, multibillion-dollar business.

Additionally, Northwell's Dr. David Samadi, chair of urology at Lenox Hill Hospital, earned \$5.6 million in 2014, according to *Crain's*.

Other top-paid New York-area hospital executives included Montefiore's Dr. Steven Safyer (\$4.8 million), NYU Langone's Dr. Robert Grossman (\$4.7 million), Atlantic Health System's Joseph Trunfio (\$4.6 million), New York-Presbyterian's Dr. Steven Corwin (\$4.4 million) and Mount Sinai's Dr. Ken Davis (\$4.1 million).

Northwell Health, *Crain's* reports, is the state's largest private employer: a 61,000-employee, 21-hospital system.

At the same time, *Crain's* also reports that Dr. W. Gordon Frankle, currently chief of psychiatry at Rutland Regional Medical Center in Vermont, will head up NYU Lutheran Medical Center's psychiatric and behavioral health services come September 1, 2016.

4. Medical students now cross-training

New York's Hofstra University, along with a growing number of medical schools nationwide, is part of a movement in medical education to immerse first-year students into the nitty-gritty of day-to-day medical care.

That includes having them accompany professional paramedics and EMTs on emergency

response runs in city ambulances.

The thinking is to train the next generation of physicians in ways that will allow them to adapt quickly to changing delivery-system models—including training them on how to work in teams and understand the roles played by other professionals.

Architects of the new programs also say that by exposing students to the complex needs of patients with multiple chronic conditions, they will be more willing, once they become doctors, to understand the needs of such patients and how to care for them in a more holistic manner.

5. Richard Davidson, American Hospital Association (AHA) president, 1937-2016

Richard "Dick" Davidson, the second longest-serving president in the AHA's 118-year history, passed away March 28. He was 79.

Under Davidson's leadership from 1991 to 2007, the AHA moved to publicize hospital quality information and engage community care networks to improve patient care. Those efforts are considered the predecessor to today's accountable care organizations (ACOs).

In 2007, Davidson received the Distinguished Service Award, the AHA's highest honor, which recognizes significant lifetime contributions and service.

6. Hospital Dept. Director: structure biggest barrier to practicing medicine

Benioff Children's Hospital (California) Director of Pediatric Dermatology Ilona J. Frieden, M.D. tells industry outlet *MedPage Today* in an April interview that biggest barrier to practicing medicine today is "the structure of the system itself."

"I feel like we in medicine live simultaneously in both the best and worst of all possible worlds," she said. "The system for delivering medicine in the United States is a poorly functioning patchwork quilt that is a hybrid between free enterprise and single-payer delivery of care. Often it feels like we are incorporating the worst aspects of both."

7. Insider survey: Hospitals weakest in unpunished staff errors, handoffs, staffing

In a telling nugget buried deep inside the recently-released *Hospital Survey on Patient Safety Culture 2016*, hospital staff report that the three areas in which hospitals need the most improvement are in non-punitive responses to staff errors, passing along important patient information when patients are transferred between units or when shifts change, and adequate hospital staffing to provide quality patient care.

Conversely, the report records an 82-percent positive response to hospital staff teamwork, supervisor leadership in promoting patient safety (78 percent positive), and making positive changes based on mistakes (73 percent positive).

The study was commissioned by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), a subdivision of the federal U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS).

8. South Nassau hospital financially falters

Long Island's South Nassau Communities Hospital reported about \$145,000 in operating income last year, falling well short of its \$8 million profit in 2014. After other items, including a \$4.1 million investment loss, the Oceanside, L.I., hospital had a \$3.8 million loss, according to audited financial statements released in early April. The hospital's investment shortfall mirrored the experience of several other area hospitals and a national trend of hospitals that lost money in the market last year.

9. Joint Commission looks at medical discrimination

In a recent issue of its industry publication *Quick Safety*, healthcare organization rating firm The Joint Commission took another look at implicit bias, or persistent and subtle discrimination against minorities by the medical establishment.

"There is extensive evidence and research that finds unconscious biases can lead to differential treatment of patients by race, gender, weight, age, language, income and insurance status," read the report. It defines "implicit bias" as "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner."

First artificial skin with hair, sweat

Scientists at Kobe, Japan's Riken Centre for Developmental Biology have successfully transplanted mice with lab-grown skin that has more of skin's layers and parts than ever before.

Most notably, in an international first, the researchers created artificial skin that grows hair follicles and sweat glands. Artificial skin currently used in medicine does not.

The breakthrough, conducted on mice using mouse stem cells, will take five to ten years to translate to humans, though, according to the researchers. They hope that the development will eventually lead to skin that can be grown from burn victims' cells and transplanted back to them.

The research was published recently in the journal *Science Advances*.

Risky heart surgery safer: Study

A rare ten-year study of hundreds of heart patients across 22 countries found that coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery, coupled with standard medical therapy, was better for heart patients than standard medical therapy alone.

Specifically, the Duke University Medical Center study found that people treated for coronary artery disease with both CABG and standard medical therapy had a 16-percent reduction in risk of death from any cause over ten years.

The invasive procedure, in which blood flow to the heart is improved by bypassing clogged arteries, has now been shown to extend lives of patients with heart failure.

The study was published in April in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

In related news, recently-approved heart-failure drug Entresto is still not quite catching on.

And another heart-related study, this one also in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, indicated that heart-beat-correcting drugs amiodarone and lidocaine may slightly benefit sudden cardiac arrest patients when given by emergency responders outside of hospitals. Only ten percent of people survive sudden cardiac arrest, in which the heart stops pumping, outside of hospitals.

Concussion blood test, device

Two proteins released into the bloodstream after the common head injuries called concussions may eventually lead to a rapid blood test, possibly even with a handheld device. That blood test would allow caregivers to more quickly and reliably diagnose concussions closer to their occurrence, allowing for faster and better treatment.

Researchers at the Orlando Regional Medical Center tested about 300 adults who came to the ER for treatment of concussions—taking regular blood samples for seven days following the injuries. Their study found that blood levels of the two proteins, so-called biomarkers which are normally present in brain cells, were much higher in concussion patients than they were in 300 other ER patients with without brain injuries.

At the same time, Florida company Banyan Biomarkers and Royal Philips are collaborating on developing a hand-held device that would analyze blood samples in the field moments after suspected concussions—possibly allowing for definitive diagnoses by detecting the proteins.

Researchers are still some time away from a definitive blood test, as there may be more

HAPPENING in HEALTH TODAY

biomarkers released into the bloodstream by concussions—and proof that their increased presence is directly caused by concussions still needs to be demonstrated in further trials.

Over two million people a year nationwide get ER treatment for concussions and other brain trauma. Damage may not be visible on imaging tests so doctors typically rely on symptoms. Diagnosis is important because repeated head blows have been linked with lasting memory problems and even degenerative brain disease.

Promising new dengue vaccine

A common-sense approach to quickly developing vaccines that work—injecting volunteers with antibodies and giving them a curable virus six months later—has now been used in an NIH study to demonstrate that the prototype TV003 vaccine works against the Type 2 strain of the dengue virus. (Vaccine studies can ordinarily take up to ten years.)

In the “human challenge” trial, 92 percent of volunteers injected with TV003 developed antibodies to all four dengue strains. A half-year later, all volunteers were given dengue type 2.

None of the vaccinated adults got infected, while 80 percent of the placebo group developed rashes.

Dengue is the world's most common mosquito-spread virus. It is currently creating an epidemic in Latin America and elsewhere, can be dangerous, but is usually treatable. There is no widely effective global dengue vaccine, though. (The Dengvaxia vaccine is only available in four countries, excluding the U.S.; it only protects against one dengue strain and is known to not work well, or to even make dengue worse.)

The study was published in March in *Science Translational Medicine*.

D not for knee

Several studies in recent years on whether vitamin D supplements benefit people with osteoarthritis have produced conflicting results. A new one, though, finds the supplements produce no benefit.

The Australian study, published March 8 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, had 400 osteoarthritis patients with low vitamin D levels take high monthly levels of the vitamin, or a placebo, over a two-year period.

Over the two years, researchers reported no difference between the groups in reduced pain, loss of cartilage or improvement in bone marrow in the thigh or shin bone.

Vitamin D has several other health benefits, though, and the study results should not discourage people from taking the vitamin, experts say.

Strep pills for cavities?

A new study by the University of Florida College of Dentistry found that a strain of the

streptococcus bacterium—strains of which commonly cause “strep throat” infections—may actually keep teeth healthier by controlling “bad” bacteria in the mouth.

The researchers explain that “bad” bacteria in the mouth create acids on tooth surfaces, resulting in cavities and other problems—but that the “good” strep strain called A12 counters them.

Researchers believe that if they can scientifically demonstrate a cause-and-effect link between more A12 strep and less cavities in patients' mouths, it may even make possible a probiotic anti-cavity pill or supplement.

More little siblings, less obesity?

In another statistical curiosity for which health studies are famous (or infamous), a University of Michigan study found that kids who had younger siblings by the time they were age four were about three times less likely to be obese by 1st Grade than kids who had no little brothers or sisters by the time they started 1st Grade.

Like so many other studies that find correlations between two facts without determining any cause, the study does not explain why less obesity occurs in little kids with more little siblings. Study author Dr. Julie Lumeng speculates that a growing household might translate to a more active—and hence more physically fit—household, in contrast to the stagnation of technology used and overused in the absence of real-life playmates.

The study appears in the April issue of *Pediatrics*.

LEAP-ing ahead against peanut allergies

Repeatedly expose yourself to something that's known to be allergic before you get allergic: That's the concept behind Learning Early About Peanut allergy (LEAP). That British study exposed and/or fed peanuts to kids at risk for peanut allergy from birth to age five. It resulted in an 81-percent reduction in peanut allergy.

But now, in LEAP-ON, LEAP's follow-up study, 282 peanut-exposed five-year-olds were contrasted with non-exposed five-year-olds. Both groups avoided peanut product for a year.

By age six, the peanut-exposed group reported a 4.8-percent rate of peanut allergy. The other kids, exposed to peanut product at age six for their first time, reported an 18.6-percent rate.

Peanut allergy usually develops early in life, is rarely outgrown, and is the most dangerous food allergy in the U.S. The study was published March 4 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

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Healthcare industry still exploding

Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) numbers released on April 1 indicate that the healthcare industry grew by 503,000 new jobs in the past year. Over 183,000 of those are hospital-related.

With over 15.4 million workers, up about three million in the last decade, the healthcare industry is poised to overtake retail by 2019. (Healthcare overtook manufacturing seven years ago.)

Forty years, 40 health milestones

Over 700 people responded to *Modern Healthcare's* call for the top 40 healthcare milestones since the magazine's 1976 founding. Their picks for biggest history-makers include:

- Introduction of MRI scans in 1980 (#2)
- Enforcement of seat belt laws in every state by 1995 (#12)
- Federal taxpayer-funded vaccines for low-income kids in 1994 (#18)
- The 1997 FDA decision to legalize drug advertising (#21)
- The 1948-and-still-going Framingham Heart Study, which linked heart disease to high cholesterol and blood pressure in 1961 and to atrial fibrillation in 1998 (#29)
- The 2009 crackdown on Medicare/Medicaid fraud, saving over \$16.4 billion since (#37)
- The first artificial heart, the Jarvik 7, implanted in 1982 (#40)

Taking the #1 spot? The June 2000 sequencing of the human genome.

U.S. disability rising: report

In late March, the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability released its *Disability Statistics Annual Report* for 2015. The report, which looks at national disability-related facts and figures, contained several interesting findings, including:

- The U.S. percentage of people with any disability rose from 11.9 in 2010 to 12.6 by 2014
- The lowest and highest state disability percentages were 9.6 percent (Utah) and 19.9 percent (West Virginia)

In the report, New York State was also one of only 11 states in 2014 where people with disabilities had average annual incomes of over \$22,650.

Expert: Medical research biased

In a recent essay in the *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, internationally renowned



Stanford University medical statistics researcher John Ioannidis makes the scathing assertion that modern evidence-based medicine has been "hijacked."

Dr. Ioannidis essentially says that most scientific medical evidence is cherry-picked and otherwise misused and abused by various biased parties to support their views and products.

He also says that taxpayer-funded research is driven primarily by researchers seeking the most funding, not by public funders seeking to fund research that can produce the most useful evidence.

Political care

According to a recent survey of healthcare professionals, just about half—48 percent—reported that they discuss politics with patients. The other 52 percent said "No," though.

Student takes kiosk CPR, saves 2nd student

Ohio college student Matt Lickenbrock spent ten minutes pumping a dummy's rubber chest at a CPR training kiosk in an airport until the machine told him he got it right.

Two days later, he revived fellow student Sean Ferguson, who had just been struck by lightning and left unconscious and pulseless in a parking lot.

The two unwitting poster boys for the game-like CPR kiosks, which have trained thousands of curious travelers at several U.S. airports since their 2013 introduction, are now unveiling the kiosks in Chicago, Las Vegas, Atlanta and Baltimore.

"If it weren't for that kiosk, I wouldn't be here today," said Ferguson.

"I'm a regular guy and I learned CPR in approximately ten minutes and saved a life," said Lickenbrock. "That means anyone else can do the same thing."

The kiosks are sponsored by the American Heart Association (AHA) and health insurer Anthem.

Most sugar, half of calories, in U.S. 'ultra-processed' foods

A Brazilian study in April's *BMJ Open* edition finds that over half of the average American's diet is made of so-called ultra-processed foods.

In turn, most Americans are consuming way too much sugar—most of which comes from ultra-processed foods.

Ultra-processed foods are concoctions of several ingredients, including salt, sugar, oils and fats. They also contain chemicals not generally used in cooking, such as flavorings, emulsifiers and other additives designed to mimic real foods. Common examples include soda, most snacks and "junk food," packaged baked goods, and "instant" and frozen items like nuggets and pizza.

The research was based on health and nutrition data on 9,000 Americans from the 2009-10 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES).

Experts say that one simple and highly effective way to drastically cut back on the sugar and chemicals of ultra-processed foods is to replace them with home-made equivalents using simple and freshly-bought ingredients.

Two-dose chickenpox shot works

A Philadelphia Department of Public Health study, published April in *Pediatrics*, verifies that the two-dose chickenpox vaccine is nearly 100-percent effective, and more effective than the older one-shot approach.

The two-dose treatment, with the first shot at age one and the second between ages four to six, was first recommended by the CDC in 2006. Routine vaccination for the once-common childhood disease was first introduced in 1995.

New York 1st 'e-prescribe' state

A New York State law, I-Stop, went into effect in March, making the state the first to require electronic prescribing at the risk of penalty, including fines and civil and criminal penalties.

Electronic prescribing has increased significantly as government requirements for the use of electronic health records (HER) have been implemented. In April 2014, about 70 percent of physicians were prescribing electronically, according to an analysis from the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology.

Therapy first, opioids second: CDC

Responding to the ongoing epidemic of addiction and abuse of opioid-base prescription painkillers like OxyContin and Vicodin, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued new doctors' recommendations mid-March on prescribing the powerful drugs.

The guidelines—which are not law—now call for doctors to prescribe the painkillers only after prescribing regimens of over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, physical therapy and exercise for such common sources of chronic pain like back pain and arthritis.

The new recommendations represent an effort to reverse nearly two decades of rising painkiller use, which officials blame for a more than four-fold increase in overdose deaths tied to the drugs. In 2014, U.S. doctors wrote nearly 200 million prescriptions for opioid painkillers, while deaths linked to the drugs climbed to roughly 19,000, the highest number on record.

For its part, New York has cracked down on "pill mills" by using databases to monitor what doctors are prescribing.

Cold turkey smokes gradual

An Oxford University study, published this March in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, now suggests that going cold turkey—abrupt and (hopefully!) complete cessation—works best.

The study had nearly 700 British smokers of at least 15 cigarettes a day set a quit date for two weeks. Half were randomly assigned to smoke normally until the quit date, then abruptly stop. The other half were assigned to gradually reduce their smoking until the quit date.

After monitoring them over the following four weeks, and a follow-up six months later, researchers found that those who abruptly quit had a 49-percent success rate at one month and 22 percent at 12 months. The gradual quitters, by contrast, were only 39 percent smoke-free by one month, and 15 percent by 12 months.

In related news, a study of the increasingly popular electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) published in *Tobacco Control* found that e-cigarettes cost more in most of the world, except in England.

Globe more obese than underweight

Seems that too much food is now a bigger problem worldwide than too little food.

British research published March 31 in *The Lancet* reports that the number of obese people in the world rose from 105 million in 1975 to 641 million in 2014. According to the study by the Imperial College London's School of Public Health, obesity rates rose from three percent to 11 percent among men and from six percent to 15 percent among women.

What's more, over 25 percent of severely obese men and close to 20 percent of severely obese women live in the United States, the researchers said.

"Over the past 40 years, we have changed from a world in which underweight prevalence was more than double that of obesity, to one in which more people are obese than underweight," said study senior author Majid Ezzati.

In related news, Stony Brook Children's Hospital child obesity specialist Dr. Rosa Cataldo says that spring is the perfect time to get the entire family into outdoor activities and combat obesity—as well as consuming fresher, healthier and less sugary foods and drinks. ■



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