Autism Speaks Funds Research Programs

Three autism research projects will investigate wandering, communication challenges and screening in underserved regions (bit.ly/as-3studies).

The three-year projects are funded by $1.6 million in grants from Autism Speaks.

Emory University’s Marcus Autism Center will test a personalized intervention program for curbing autism-related wandering from safe and supervised places. The randomized controlled trial with 76 children will compare a 16-week behavioral intervention with a psychoeducational program.

In a clinical trial, Phoenix Children’s Hospital researchers will study the effects of leucovorin (a form of folate) on the verbal communication and sociability of 80 children with autism who have antibodies that block the brain-cell receptors that respond to naturally occurring folate.

Researchers from the KEMRI Wellcome Trust Research Programme in Nairobi, Kenya, will develop and test autism screening and diagnosis methods for their effectiveness and practicality in low- and moderate-income countries. Pilot testing of the methods will begin in Kenya, South Africa and Malawi.

First-Responders’ Checklist Helps Ensure Effective Communication

A new checklist—written in plain language—can help first responders communicate with and provide services to people with limited English proficiency and people with disabilities during emergency response and recovery efforts.

The document (bit.ly/fr-checklist), from the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, includes recommendations, action steps and resources for first responders on providing on-the-ground language assistance and communicating effectively in disasters. It complements a 2016 emergency preparedness checklist (bit.ly/emer-prepare) designed for emergency managers.

Practical tips include how to identify language needs in a community, identify people with disabilities who need communication support, identify local partners who serve these populations, coordinate with media to share emergency information, provide language assistance services, and effectively use interpreters.

Federal civil rights laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, mandate that federally funded emergency response and recovery services be accessible to people with limited English proficiency and people with disabilities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. residents speak at least 350 languages, about 15 percent of adults report some trouble hearing, 8.1 million people have visual impairment, and 32 million adults are illiterate.

Ethiopia Welcomes Its First SLPs

A cooperative program between African and Canadian universities has produced Ethiopia’s first eight homegrown speech-language pathologists.

The Toronto Addis Ababa Academic Collaboration (TAAAC), a 15-year cooperative agreement between Addis Ababa University and the University of Toronto, trains Ethiopian students in medical, engineering and other disciplines.

To date, Ethiopia had only one practicing—but not technically qualified—SLP, according to information from the University of Toronto. The first class of SLPs graduated from Addis Ababa University in January 2019, and all intend to remain in Ethiopia.

TAAAC began with the study of psychiatry in 2003, and now spans 24 disciplines. More than 90 percent of TAAAC graduates remain in Ethiopia to work.