Today’s piece was prepared by Maya Hughes, MD, based on an article from the New York Times, “New Definition of Autism Will Exclude Many, Study Suggests”.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/20/health/research/new-autism-definition-would-exclude-many-study-suggests.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&ref=health>

The article explores the possibility that modifications to the current definition of autism may lead to a reduction in the number of individuals who will continue to meet diagnostic criteria for the disorder.  The article suggests that the latter is of growing concern to many families who fear that several services their children are currently receiving may end because their child may no longer meet the proposed stricter criteria for diagnosis.  The author explains that the upcoming edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders will likely eliminate the diagnoses of Asperger’s and Pervasive Developmental Disorder NOS. Instead, Autism, Asperger’s and Pervasive Developmental Disorder NOS will be consolidated into a single category of Autism Spectrum Disorder. To qualify for the diagnosis, an individual would require 3 deficits in social interaction and communication and at least 2 repetitive behaviors.  The latter is believed to be much more restrictive than the current diagnostic criteria, which requires 6 of 12 pre-defined atypical behaviors.  The article goes on to make reference to an analysis performed by two Yale researchers who examined 372 high functioning children and adults who currently meet criteria for an autism spectrum disorder, and notes that only 45% of them would continue to meet diagnostic criteria under the newly proposed definition.

While this article would likely initially worry many parents of higher functioning children who are on the autism spectrum, the article does a decent job of attempting to quell hysteria by noting larger population-based studies are needed (and being performed) before conclusions can be drawn regarding changes to those who will continue to meet diagnostic criteria.  The author also assures families that diagnosis alone does not always determine which supportive services a child may qualify for; therefore, it may be premature to worry that services may end. Overall, this is a well written article that informs the public of the upcoming revision to the current definition of autism.  While the latter may alter who continues to meet diagnostic criteria for an autism spectrum disorder, the author does a good job of noting the need for larger based studies before such worries expand.

**AUTISM RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES:**

Autism Society of Washington *Advocacy, public awareness & education. Part of the national Autism Society* [www.autismsocietyofwa.org/](http://www.autismsocietyofwa.org/)

Autism Practice Guidelines [www.health.ny.gov/community/infants\_children/early\_intervention/autism/](http://www.health.ny.gov/community/infants_children/early_intervention/autism/) *New York State Dept of Health web page*

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!