Today’s piece was prepared by Greg Dolan, MD, based on a NY Times story,

 “Study Links Autism and Somalis in Minneapolis”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/17/health/study-links-autism-and-somalis-in-minneapolis.html?_r=0>

Donald McNeil reviews a recent study finding one in 32 Somali children and one in 36 white children were on the autism spectrum in Minneapolis, in contrast to the nationally one in 88 children reported by the CDC. Somali children were also more likely to be diagnosed late (average age of 5) and all had I.Q. deficits, making them less likely to be “high functioning.” The results were similar to those of a Swedish study . The author gives anecdotes from Somali families relieved to have their children’s symptoms formally acknowledged. It also validated their concern that 25%of special education classes were Somali in contrast to Somali children making up 6% of the student body.

This article raises awareness to a discrepancy of unknown significance. The study design was retrospective and analyzed educational records rather than individual children, leaving questions as to the accuracy of diagnosis. Retrospective-design studies provides advantages of lower cost, availability of data and can help generate hypotheses for later prospective-design studies. However, retrospective studies are quite limited, susceptible to inaccuracy of records and variability in methods across sites and evaluators, absence of control for bias and confounders, and inability to examine cause-and-effect. Moreover, the CDC reports that autism rates vary widely in the communities studied. The article doesn’t mention barriers to access of evaluation or treatment, such as cultural or socioeconomic challenges that may affect availability or time to diagnosis and perception of autism cues. The article fails to comment that autism in whites was also significantly higher than the national average. One must be wary when reading statistics that are not backed by potential causality. This type of reporting is ripe for biased interpretation. Nevertheless, the author is faithful in reporting some of these limitations and the topic gives pause for reflection considering Seattle’s demographic.

**RESOURCES ON AUTISM:**

Autism awareness guide:

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/Autism.aspx>

CDC Autism research:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/research.html>

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