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WOU Conference on Autism Spectrum Disorders highlights educational and medical expertise

MONMOUTH – Western Oregon University will host the Conference on Autism Spectrum Disorders on Saturday, April 29 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Pacific Room of Werner University Center as a conclusion to Autism Awareness Month.

This event is designed to bring together parents, educators, instructional assistants, administrators, medical professionals and more to talk about autism. Information provided will be geared toward both a biomedical and educational emphasis.

Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life. There is no biological test for autism, thus diagnosis is based on symptoms, characteristics or behaviors. Symptoms include: no, little, delayed or unusual speech; anti-social or awkward social behavior; obsessive-compulsive like behavior; little to no eye contact and excessive or severe tantrums.

Mickey Pardew, WOU special education professor and conference coordinator, has a brother who was diagnosed with autism 50 years ago. She said: “families with a child with autism need support. Their lives are very different, but can also be very adaptive if given the correct support. By educating yourself about autism spectrum disorders, you will know how best to interact with individuals who have autism.”

It is estimated that one in 166 births results in autism and its associated behaviors, and unfortunately, Oregon has one of the highest rates of autism spectrum disorders among its population. The disability is four times more prevalent in boys than girls.

WOU’s College of Education is a national leader in its field, and the special education department is emerging as a resource in autism awareness and education.

“With over a half a million individuals diagnosed with autism nationally and a higher than average rate of incidence in Oregon, this conference is vital in bringing together the medical professionals, families, and educators to share the most current and relevant information about the diagnosis and treatment of autism,” said WOU College of Education Dean Hilda Rosselli.

The Conference on Autism Spectrum Disorders will feature a wide array of speakers including scientists, parents of children with autism and Aspergers, medical professionals and educators.

A resource fair will be open throughout the event. Organizations represented include: the Northwest Autism Foundation, Autism Society of Oregon, Help Autism Now Society, Oregon Parent Training and Information Center, Swindell Center, Parents of Autistic Children of Oregon and Life Span Respite.

The event is open to the public and there is no fee for the conference, however, a \$15 donation to the Northwest Autism Foundation is requested. Refreshments will be provided during the morning check-in and participants are encouraged to bring a brown bag lunch for the lunch hour table talks, or visit a local restaurant.

The Conference on Autism Spectrum Disorders is sponsored by WOU and the Northwest Autism Foundation. To register for the conference please visit www.wou.edu/autism. This site also has the event schedule and speaker biographies.

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Sources and conference speakers:

Mickey Pardew, WOU special education professor
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Steve Edelson, scientist conducting research on causes and treatments of autism
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Jennifer Rowan, teacher for the Social Communication Intervention Program in the Salem-Keizer School District
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