




Genetics and Autism




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cacccccaa ctaacacatt attttccct cccactccca tactactaat
caaccctcgc ceatctaac cagcacacac acaccctgctc taaccctata






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Richard G. Boles, M.D.
 Chief Medical & Scientific Officer
 NeuroNeeds LLC
 Director, CNNH NeuroGenomics Program
 National Autism Conference, Great Valley, PA
 May 17, 2019



Disclosure: Dr. Boles wears many hats


- Clinician treating patients
 - Primary interests in functional disease (autism, cyclic vomiting)
 - Past: Geneticist/pediatrician 20 years at CHLA/USC
 - Present: Director, CNNH NeuroGenomics Program (<https://cnnh.org>) - press the "Genetics" button
 - Present: In private practice in California (<http://molecularmitomd.com>)
- Chief Medical & Scientific Officer of NeuroNeeds LLC
 - Present: The company that produces SpectrumNeeds® and QNeeds® (<https://neuroneeds.com>)
- Medical Director for DNA Sequencing Companies
 - Past: 5 years at Courtagen Life Sciences; 6 months at Lineagen
 - Present: Free agent, ordering from multiple companies
- Expert witness in legal cases
 - Present: Medical child abuse, child neglect and custody cases (drboles@molecularmito.com)
 - Vaccine Court, malpractice cases
- Researcher with prior NIH and foundation funding
 - Past: USC faculty for 20 years
 - Present: Study sequence variation that predispose towards neurodevelopmental and functional disorders




Disclosure & Off-label Indications

In personalized medicine, most treatments are “off label”. None of the statements in this talk have been reviewed by the FDA.

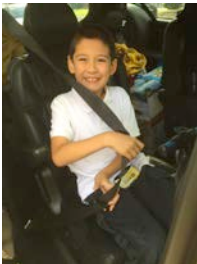

A general overview of genetic testing in autism is provided in this talk. Dr. Boles does NOT have a conflict of interest to disclose in terms of this talk.



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Case Study: (Relatively-Uncomplicated) Autism Carter, *TRAP1*

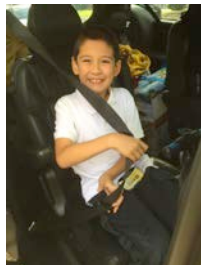
- Carter presented at age 1 year following the MMR vaccination, after which he stopped developing speech for the next year.
- He was later diagnosed with autism.
- Biochemical laboratory testing has suggested the possibility of a mitochondrial disorder.
- DNA sequencing revealed the *TRAP1* p.Ile253Val variant.
- *TRAP1* p.Ile253Val is a variant present in about 1% of the general population.
- This gene encodes for a chaperone that protects mitochondrial proteins from oxidative stress.
- Certain variants in this gene are associated with chronic pain, fatigue, and GI symptoms.
- Autism is present in many of the boys with *TRAP1*-related disease, and this association is statistically significant.

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Case Study: (Relatively-Uncomplicated) Autism


Carter, *TRAP1*



- Kytril was predicted by computer modeling to tightly bind in the mutant 253-valine ATP-binding pocket, but not the wild-type 253-isoleucine pocket.
- Following informed consent, this drug was tried in Carter. The anecdotal results were clear and dose-dependent, in that on the drug Carter was:
 - more **talkative**, expresses himself better
 - more **clever**
 - more **focused***
 - **less aggressive***
 - less **sensory integration** issues*
 - **getting along better** with his older brother
 - **more tolerate** of previously-difficult situations




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Case Study: Neurotypical

Payton, *TRAP1*

- **Cyclic vomiting** syndrome from ages 1-10
- Episodes had morphed into **daily migraine**.
- Chronic pain throughout her body.
- **Chronic fatigue syndrome = chief complaint**.
- Multiple admissions for **bowel clean-outs**.
- Excellent student
- Same variant as Carter: p.Ile253Val “common mutation” in the TRAP1 mitochondrial chaperone
- This variant was also found in many other patients with “functional” symptoms such as chronic pain, fatigue and GI dysmotility.
- Essentially all disease manifestations resolved on Kytril therapy.





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“Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

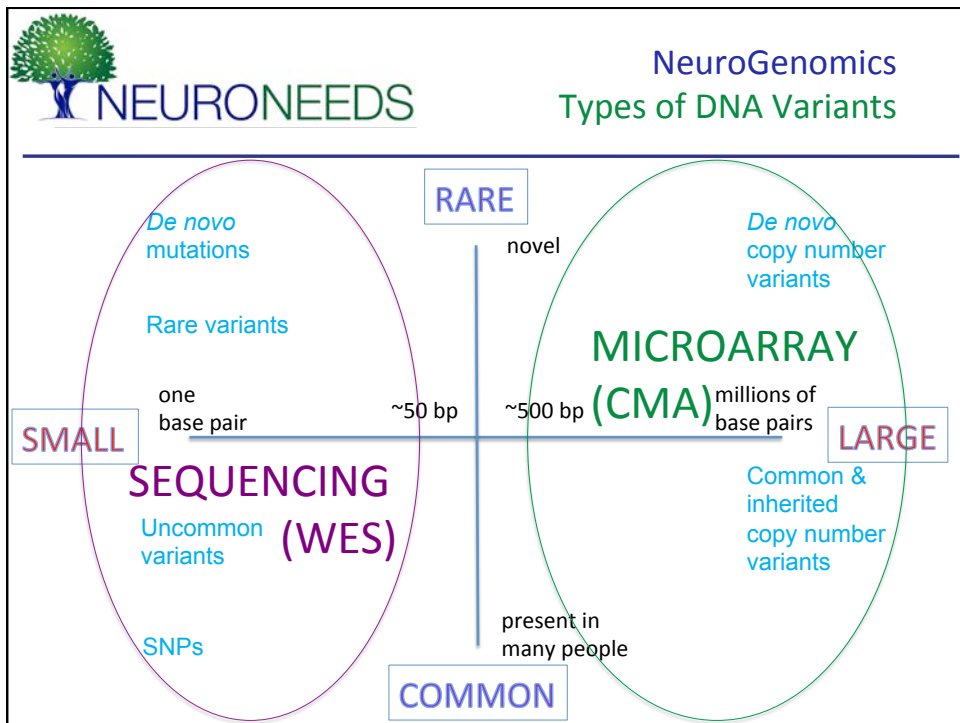
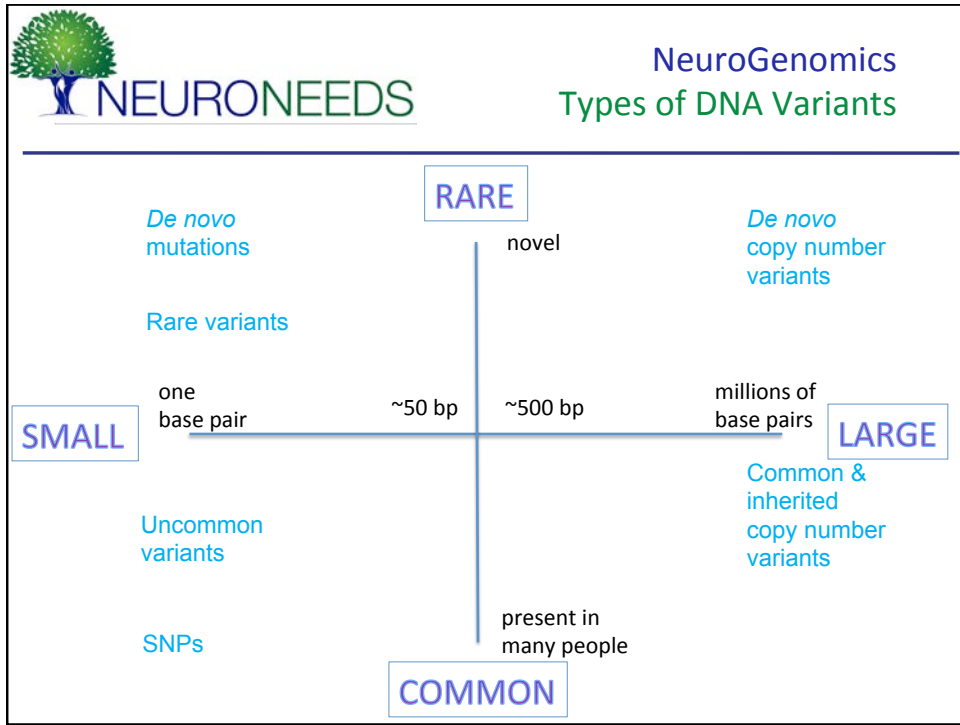
Clarke’s Third Law




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DNA Sequencing
Illumina HiSeq 4000





 **Autism Genomics**
Copy Number Variants (CNVs)


CNV	# studies
16p11.2	79
15q11.2	65
22q11.21	56
15q13.3	51
2p16.3	50
3q29	45
1q21.1	44
17q12	44
Xq28	43
22q13.33	42
7q11.23	41
17p11.2	38
17p13.3	37

- Size: Hundreds to millions of nucleotides
- Can be either *de novo* or inherited
- CNV are generally not detected on exome sequencing, but can be detected by:
 - Chromosomal microarray (CMA) technology.
 - Whole genome sequencing (WGS).

Typical signs of a CNV:


- Intellectual disability
- Other neurological defects
 - seizures
 - hypotonia
- Growth anomaly
- Birth defects
- Dysmorphic features

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 **NeuroGenomics**
Copy Number Variants (CNVs)


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16p11.2	79
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17p13.3	37

DiGeorge, velocardiofacial, Opitz G/BBB syndromes:
 COMT for behavioral changes
 TBX1 for birth defects, including cardiac



CNVs are commonly found in a normal, or near-normal, parent. They serve as risk factors for disease manifestations, including autism.
 Many times, identification of the genetic variant can help guide additional studies and therapy.


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NeuroGenomics

Copy Number Variants (CNVs)

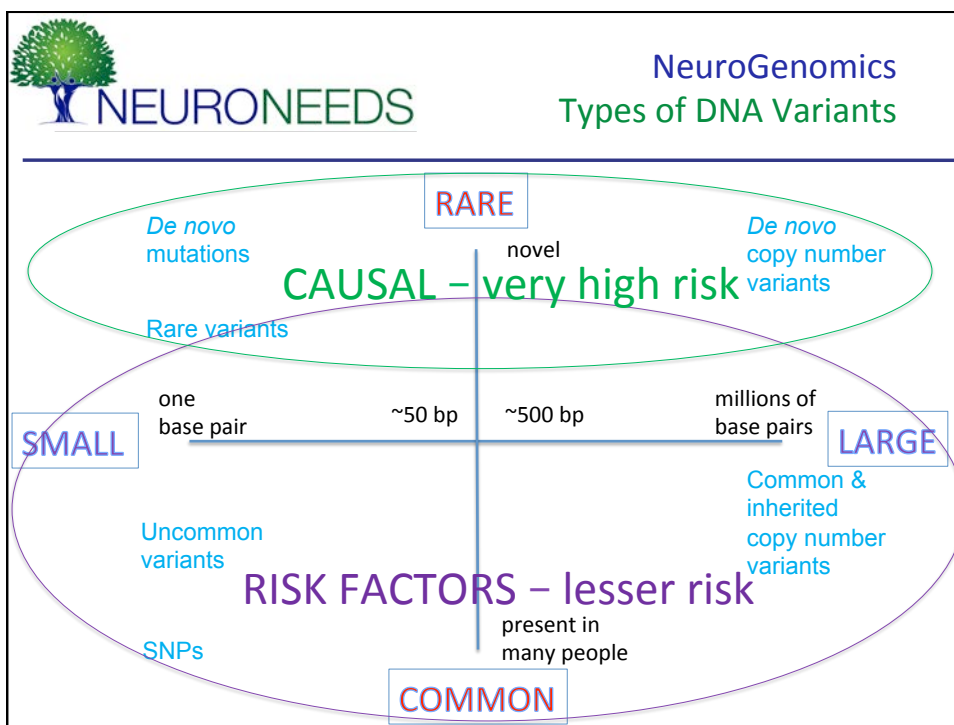
CNV	# studies	
16p11.2	79	
15q11.2	65	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="font-size: 2em; margin-right: 10px;">➔</div> <div style="text-align: left;"> <p>Angelman syndrome: UBE3A MR/autism, absent speech, epilepsy, ataxia, bizarre laughing, hypopigmentation</p> </div> <div style="font-size: 2em; margin-left: 10px;">➔</div> </div>
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17p11.2	38	
17p13.3	37	



ANGELMAN SYNDROME

Testing:
Requires imprinting testing to detect most cases, and sequencing for the remainder. Some cases can be identified by CMA.

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Genetic Models of Autism *De Novo* Versus Risk Factor

- *De novo* variants:
 - New mutations not present in either parent.
 - Often are the main cause of disease.
 - Present in about one-third of autism patients.
 - Low inheritance risk in additional children, generally < 1%.
- **Inherited variants:**
 - Inherited from one parent, occasionally both.
 - Generally predispose towards disease in a polygenic manner.
 - Environmental components appear to be common.
 - **Family members with these variants can -**
 - be completely normal.
 - show *forme fruste* phenotypes.
 - have another neurodevelopmental disorder (e.g. ADHD).
 - have an autistic spectrum disorder.

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Case Study: Complicated Autism Zach

- Autism, cyclic vomiting syndrome, bowel dysmotility, complex regional pain syndrome, headache, muscle pain, severe exercise intolerance, rhabdomyolysis
- Improvement on mitochondrial cocktail
- **Later, genetic testing revealed underlying factors in illness that led to substantial improvements in expressive speech and autistic features.**



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Case Study: Complicated Autism

Zach

- A variant likely associated with disease was identified in the CHAT gene.
- This gene encodes for the enzyme, **choline O-acetyltransferase**, that catalyzes the synthesis of acetylcholine from choline and acetyl-CoA in cholinergic neurons.
- Appears in polygenic disease, particularly with mitochondrial disease.
- Distinct manifestations are:
 - Episodic mental status changes w/o known triggers
 - POTS/dysautonomia
 - Severe reactions to anticholinergic medications
- Anecdotal, yet dramatic, improvement with anticholinesterase inhibitors donepezil (Aricept) and pyridostigmine (Mestinon).
 - Expressive speech improved dramatically on donepezil.




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Case Study: Autism and Seizures

Luca

- Profound hypotonia and loss of language skills following a routine vaccination at age 9 months.
- Autism, seizures, severe GI dysmotility and chronic fatigue.
- All further vaccinations were withheld.
- Substantial improved on supplements.
- **Later, DNA sequencing revealed a variant that is an excellent candidate for being disease-related:**







Case Study: Autism and Seizures

Luca

- Profound hypotonia and loss of language skills following a routine vaccination at age 9 months.
- Autism, seizures, severe GI dysmotility and chronic fatigue.
- All further vaccinations were withheld.
- Substantial improved on supplements.
- Later, DNA sequencing revealed a variant that is an excellent candidate for being disease-related:
 - Variants in the *SCN1A* gene are associated with epilepsy, autism, and vaccine-related injury.
- The family has also withheld all vaccinations in his brother, who is unaffected except for hearing loss.
 - The brother was found NOT to carry the *SCN1A* variant.



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Genetic Sequencing

From Genome to Single Gene


- Whole genome sequencing (“genome”, “WGS”)
 - Includes the 98% of the DNA that does not encode the exome, yet is poorly understood.
 - Used in research for years, and entering clinical practice as utility increases and costs decrease.
 - Often less expensive than ordering WES + mtDNA + CMA.
- Whole exome sequencing (“exome”, “WES”)
 - All of the protein coding sequences + splice sites
 - In clinical practice, only a relevant gene list is fully interpreted.
- Large panels
 - Panels of hundreds to thousands of genes that are comprehensive for a specific clinical indication (e.g. autism, epilepsy, mitochondria)
- Small panels
 - Less expensive panels that only include a minority of genes associated with a clinical indication, chosen for being well documented, easy to interpret, higher prevalence and/or driving clinical management.
 - Not well suited for some indications whereas large numbers of genes are indicated (e.g. autism)
 - Good for specific phenotypes caused by a small number of genes, such as *Rett syndrome*.
- Single gene sequencing
 - Only applicable for typical cases of well-recognized conditions caused by a single/few gene(s), such as *Angelman syndrome*.
- Repeat length
 - For specific conditions associated with expanded repeat sequences, such as *fragile X syndrome*.

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How do I get the advantages of genetic testing for my child? What tests to order?


Mutant baby chinchillas
8-days old (x2)
or 4-hours old



Genetic Testing Costs

- Prices have dropped drastically for sequencing:
 - Self-pay exome prices are as low as \$1,000.
 - mtDNA and CMA prices are as low as \$500 each.
 - Self-pay genome prices are as low as \$1,800.
- Many laboratories will take insurance:
 - Look for labs that will run insurance, but have a low-cost self-pay option if insurance fails.
 - Insurance coverage is more likely with:
 - a Letter of Necessity.
 - appropriate ICD10 codes
- Interpretation is the most difficult step:
 - Consider the assistance of a clinical genomicist.


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NEURONEEDS Neurodevelopmental Disorders
Testing Recommendations

- Recommendations for Testing:
 - Whole exome sequencing (“exome”, “WES”)
 - Test the parents (trio) versus only the patient (singleton)
 - CNV testing by chromosomal microarray (CMA) or sequencing equivalent
 - Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequencing and CNV testing
 - Fragile X syndrome repeat testing
 - Pharmacogenetic (PGx) testing
- Whole genome sequencing:
 - Covers all of the above
 - Trio versus singleton
- Angelman syndrome testing by methylation in select cases
- EXPERT INTERPRETATION

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NEURONEEDS Neurodevelopmental Disorders
Testing Recommendations

Should you test only the patient (singleton), or the parents as well (trio)?

- Advantages of trio testing:
 - *De novo* variants
 - Phasing for recessive variants
 - Following the condition within the family
- Disadvantages of trio testing:
 - Double the price
 - Logistics of obtaining samples from both parents
- Recommendation:
 - Trio for severe cases of neurodevelopmental disorders (ASD, ID, epilepsy) and/or birth defects

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Neurodevelopmental Disorders
Testing Recommendations

Only your physician can determine what test is right for your child and order testing.

However, in most cases with autism, trio whole genome sequencing (WGS) is the correct test, in my opinion.

Who will interpret that test is the main question.

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Logistics – Who Can Read My DNA?
CNNH NeuroGenomics Program

- **Peer-to-Peer Counselling Service:**
 - Genetic testing is extremely complicated, and very few physicians can fully understand the information provided or how to apply that information to improve treatment outcomes.
 - The purpose of this service is to provide this information to treating physicians.
 - This Service includes a telemedicine conversation between the physician and Dr. Boles.
 - The family can listen in and ask questions if physically present in a state whereas Dr. Boles holds a medical license: Arizona, California, Florida, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina.
 - Different levels of the Service
 - Standard: Review up to 4 reports, including exome (WES) or genome (WGS).
 - Comprehensive: Complete reevaluation and reinterpretation from raw sequence data.
- **Telemedicine Genetics Consultations:**
 - Provides full evaluations as done in his private practice in California, except by telemedicine.
 - The patient physically must be present in a state whereas Dr. Boles holds a medical license: Arizona, California, Florida, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina.
- **For more information:**
 - Laurie Ebenau, NeuroGenomics Program Coordinator
 - Phone: (855) 852-8150 x2005; fax: (855) 266-6180
 - neurogenomics@cnnh.org
 - <https://cnnh.org> (press the “Genetics” button)

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Logistics – Who Can Read My DNA? CNNH NeuroGenomics Program

- Mintz et al.: "Peer-to-Peer": A program to Connect a Clinical Genomicist and the Treating Neurologist to Correlate Genotype with Phenotype"; AAN 2019.
 - The Program's coverage to date:
 - 17 patients
 - 8 physicians in 7 states and 3 nations
 - 6 different genetic labs.
 - Results-to-date on re-analysis of raw sequence files:
 - 94% (16/17): altered physicians' management
 - 52% (9/17): Received a pathogenic genetic diagnosis
 - 88% (15/17): Recommended changes in therapy
 - 41% (7/17): Indications for additional testing
 - 23% (4/17): Indications for additional outside consultations

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Genetic Testing in NDD/Autism My Most Recent 7 Patients 3/19

Age/ Sex	Phenotype	Genotype	Intervention
13M	Autism, absent speech, hypotonia, GI symptoms, immune dysfunction	<i>De novo</i> CHD1 GRIN1, TRAP1	NMDA antagonists Mito-cocktail
16M	High fcn autism, chronic pain and fatigue, cyclic vomiting	Lg heteroplasmic mtDNA deletion; CACNA1S missense	Mito-cocktail, acetazolamide
15M	Autism, OCD, autonomic dysfxn, episodes of rage	Frameshift in X-linked GRIA3	Venlafaxine – acts on AMPA receptor
8M	ADHD, stereotypical episodes of severe leg pain	Stop gain in SCN4A VUS: mtDNA, SCN10A	Mito-cocktail, acetazolamide
16M	Autism, autonomic over-activity, anxiety, constipation, migraine	<i>De novo</i> 84-kb deletion 8p23.1 USP17L2, USP17L17 mtDNA for migraine	Mito-cocktail
23M	Autism, epilepsy, dyspraxia, OCD, anxiety, hypotonia	Deletion of 67% of ARHGEF9 (collybistin, X-linked)	GABA and glycine agonists
23M	Changed personality to progressive psychotic behaviors, with prominent and multiple delusions	7.4 Mb duplication 5p15.2-14.3 (31 genes, 3 genes in ubiquitination)	Mito-cocktail Mg, Zn



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Genetic Testing in Autism Summary

How Do Results Improve Patient Care?

TREATMENT

1. **Right Therapy:** Detect uncommon etiologies/factors that are best treated without drugs.
2. **Right Drug:** Help choose among potential drug therapies based on mechanism.
3. **Right Dose:** Help choose the correct dose based on drug metabolite report.

COUNSELING

A name, anticipatory guidance, prognosis, recurrence risks

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Like the Fates of Ancient Greece, Is Our Destiny Written in Our DNA?



- Genetics determines risk, not outcome!
- Genes are regulated by the environment.
- *Metaphor – one hand in a card game:*
 - Genetic testing is the hand one is dealt.
 - Environmental factors are the hands of the other players.
 - Genetic testing is the careful reading of the cards in your hand.
 - The outcome of the hand depends on the cards we are dealt, the cards of our opponents, and HOW WE PLAY OUR HAND.

Play your hand to the fullest potential, know the cards in your hand!

Get genetic testing.

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Resources: For More Information



NeuroNeeds®

<https://www.neuroneeds.com>

For more information on nutritional therapy for neurodevelopmental and functional disorders.

CNNH NeuroGenomics Program

<https://cnnh.org> (click "Genetics" button)

neurogenomics@cnnh.org

For more information on the Peer-To-Peer Program to help you to understand and utilize genetic testing results.

Molecular and Mitochondrial Medicine

<http://molecularmitomd.com> ("DNA Testing" menu)

For more information on Dr. Boles' practice and on DNA testing.

Thank You,
Richard Boles, M.D.

