Lisa Croen, Ph.D.

MIND Institute Distinguished Lecturer Series – October 14, 2015

Biographical Information

Lisa Croen, PhD, is a senior research scientist at the Division of Research (DOR), Kaiser Permanente Northern California (KPNC), and the director of the Kaiser Permanente Autism Research Program. Her research interests include the epidemiology of autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders, environmental exposures and gene/environment interaction, and adverse perinatal outcomes. Currently, Dr. Croen is the principal investigator of the NIH-funded Early Markers for Autism study (EMA), and site principal investigator on two large federally funded autism studies: the Study to Explore Early Development (SEED) and the Early Autism Risk Longitudinal Investigation (EARLI). She is also heading up the Kaiser Permanente Autism Family Biobank, a collection of genetic, medical and environmental information from 5,000 families affected by autism spectrum disorders. In collaboration with clinical colleagues, she is conducting a mixed methods study to evaluate autism treatments at KPNC, and investigating health status and healthcare utilization of transition age youth and adults with autism. Dr. Croen received her master's degree in public health and her doctorate in epidemiology, both from the University of California, Berkeley.

Presentation Abstract (4:30 pm presentation)
The Epidemiology of Autism: Investigating Perinatal Risk Factors

Although the initial manifestations of autism spectrum disorders typically do not appear until several months or years after a child is born, the results of research studies conducted over the past 50 years provide overwhelming evidence that factors operating around the time of pregnancy and birth are at play. Epidemiologic studies have played a crucial role in the identification of perinatal risk factors for autism, and in directing basic science studies focused on elucidating underlying biologic mechanisms. In this talk, the process by which epidemiologists go about studying perinatal risk factors for autism spectrum disorders will be described. Findings from recent studies investigating environmental exposures, genetic factors, and their interplay, will illustrate different approaches and study designs. Studies utilizing biospecimens collected from expectant mothers and their newborns and investigating the role of immune system function in autism will be highlighted.