



7851 Enon Drive
Roanoke, Virginia 24019
540to265to5650
www.stuttering.org

Media Contact Information:

Jules Sowder
540to312to0667 (cell)
jsowder@stuttering.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Breakthrough Study Finds Genetic Link to Stuttering

Hollins Communications Research Institute Served as a Key Research Participant in National Study

ROANOKE, VA (February 11, 2010) – Hollins Communications Research Institute (HCRI – www.stuttering.org), an internationally recognized center for stuttering research and therapy innovation, participated in a breakthrough study on the genetics of stuttering that appeared as the lead article in the February 10, 2010 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The study was headed by Dr. Dennis Drayna of the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), located in Bethesda, Maryland. According to HCRI Founder and President Dr. Ronald L. Webster, the research demonstrates, for the first time, that a specific genetic linkage has been discovered within related family members who stutter. Three genes have been identified that deal with mechanisms within cells that break down and recycle metabolic products in key regions of the brain.

“While these findings are exciting, they apply only to about five percent of people who stutter,” Webster noted. “There is much more work to be completed before we have a clear picture of the extent to which genes play a role in stuttering.”

An estimated 66 million people worldwide suffer from the effects of stuttering, with three million living in the U.S, according to NIDCD. The condition can impair social growth, hinder educational and career aspirations, and produce emotional scars that may last a lifetime.

Roanoke-based HCRI was selected to participate in the NIDCD research project because their work focuses on developing objective, physically based methods for the analysis and treatment of stuttering. Over the past 37 years, HCRI scientists have studied thousands of people who stutter, aged 10 to 73, representing an extensive range of stuttering types and severities.

Nearly 5,800 people from 24 countries have participated in HCRI's stuttering treatment, which helps people learn how to replace faulty muscle activities that cause stuttering with new muscle behaviors that product lasting fluency. The center's research shows that 93 percent of clients achieve normal fluency by the end of their 12-day intensive stuttering therapy program. Follow-up studies reveal 70 to 75% retain fluency for the long term.

When asked how the discovery of the genetic link to stuttering might be relevant to the stuttering treatment program developed and administered at HCRI, Webster said that it is too early to determine the potential impact. "However, as our work progresses, we may find that only those stutterers who have related stuttering family members, and who also have extreme difficulty in learning fluency skills in therapy, may be carrying the critical genes," he explained.

Webster also noted that, at some future time, it might be possible to develop treatments for a small number of stutterers that would involve adding specific enzymes to their blood stream in order to improve cellular metabolic functions within the brain.

HCRI will again play a role in the next series of stuttering studies by the NIDCD. "There is potential for terrific discoveries in the forthcoming research," Webster added.

About HCRI

Hollins Communications Research Institute (www.stuttering.org), founded in 1972 by Ronald L. Webster, Ph.D., is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit center headquartered at 7851 Enon Drive, Roanoke, Virginia 24019. HCRI scientists pioneered the concept and development of physically based stuttering therapy. The center holds 17 intensive 12-day stuttering treatment programs annually.

Clients include John Stossel of Fox News; Arthur Blank, cofounder of Home Depot; and Annie Glenn, wife of senator and astronaut John Glenn. HCRI is located at 7851 Enon Drive, Roanoke, Virginia, 24019. Contact HCRI at admin@stuttering.org or 540-265-5650. For video speech samples and more information, visit www.stuttering.org.