

For Immediate Release

Global Team of Experts Define Non-Verbal Learning Disability

Key step in raising awareness and improving diagnosis, treatment of a condition that affects spatial learning

New York, NY [June XX, 2017] ---Faculty from Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC), along with other global leaders in the field, have found consensus regarding the precise definition of non-verbal learning disability (NVLD), a condition that affects spatial processing and learning but does not affect verbal abilities. Having the definition, they say, will help improve awareness, diagnosis, and treatment of the condition.

The definition is the result of a recent consensus conference held at CUMC which was sponsored by The NVLD Project, a Manhattan-based nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children, adolescents and adults with NVLD.

“Getting leaders in the field to agree on a standardized definition for NVLD was a necessary first step in getting NVLD accepted as a diagnosis,” noted Prudence W. Fisher, PhD, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons, and primary organizer of the conference. “Having reached consensus, we can move forward with a proposal to include the diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM).”

Individuals with NVLD have persistent difficulties in spatial or visual spatial processing, such as problems discriminating shape, size or other spatial information, distinguishing the relative position of objects in the environment or in relation to oneself, reproduction of visuospatial information, following spatial directions, and recalling spatial relationships. These difficulties are accompanied by other problems, which can vary by individual, and include motor difficulties, executive functioning problems, attention problems, social cognition or pragmatic communication problems, and lead to impairment in social functioning, academic or occupational functioning, or self care.

Currently, many people with NVLD are misdiagnosed, not receiving proper care and are unable to apply for health insurance coverage. Achieving DSM status for NVLD will raise awareness among healthcare professionals and improve diagnosis and treatment of the disability.

Participants at the two day conference included CUMC faculty, experts from other academic institutions, and educators from the New York area. Additionally, seven NVLD global experts, Drs. Jessica Broitman, Joseph Casey, Jack M. Davis, Jodene Goldenring Fine, Irene Mammarella, M. Douglas Ris, Margaret Semrud-Clikeman, and members of The NVLD Project’s Board of Directors and Advisory Board were in attendance.

The attendees discussed changing the name to “Spatial Processing Disorder (Non Verbal Learning Disability) ” to reflect the fact that spatial processing difficulty is what differentiates NVLD from other DSM disorders, and to disconnect it from the term ‘non-verbal,’ which is confusing to those unfamiliar with the disorder as those with the disability are not verbally impaired.

Getting NVLD into the DSM is a multi-step process involving expert review and public comment. NVLD experts at Columbia are currently conducting a systematic review of the scientific literature to provide supporting evidence for its inclusion in the DSM. This work is being led by Dr. Fisher, with the support of The NVLD Project.

“We are pleased to have brought global leaders in the field of NVLD together for this vitally important project,” added Laura Lemle, PhD, founder of The NVLD Project. “We are looking forward to continuing these efforts to achieve DSM status for NVLD and funding the research to support this process.”

[About The NVLD Project](#)

Founded in 2013 by Laura Lemle, PhD, The NVLD Project envisions a world where children, adolescents, and adults with Non-Verbal Learning Disability can receive a helping hand, live their lives to the fullest, and are free of any stigmatization. The NVLD Project offers resources to help children and their families sort through the challenges of this often-misunderstood learning disability.

Its main goal is to secure an official diagnosis for NVLD, specifically to gain recognition for it as a valid disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The NVLD Project, a 501©3 non-profit, is dedicated to raising awareness and funds so that those who have NVLD are understood and counted in on life. This work is accomplished through a variety of programs, including educational workshops, expert research and community outreach. For more information on NVLD and The NVLD Project please visit nvld.org.

[Columbia University Department of Psychiatry](#)

Columbia Psychiatry is among the top ranked psychiatry departments in the nation and has contributed greatly to the understanding and treatment of brain disorders. Co-located at the New York State Psychiatric Institute on the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center campus in Washington Heights, the department enjoys a rich and productive collaborative relationship with physicians in various disciplines at Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons. Columbia Psychiatry is home to distinguished clinicians and researchers noted for their clinical and research advances in the diagnosis and treatment of depression, suicide, schizophrenia, bipolar and anxiety disorders, eating disorders, substance use disorders, and childhood psychiatric disorders.