

## **Child psychiatrist, expert in genomics Dr. Matthew State speaks on hardships related to the pandemic and mental health**

Passion drives ambitions, and for Dr. Matthew State, his stems from a curiosity and devotion to discover science.

His work has focused on gene discovery related to autism and adolescents, which has brought about the identification of dozens of autism risk genes, but his clinical practice has predominantly helped serve the community psychiatry system and those in marginalized populations.

State's recent studies have looked at how the pandemic has affected mental health.

"Mental health was an enormous challenge prior to the pandemic," State said in an interview. "The number one source of disability worldwide is major depressive disorder. . . It is also the case that there are major challenges with providing access to mental health care prior to the pandemic."

He said the percentage of those who have serious psychiatric problems and receive treatment in a reasonable amount of time is low, especially among adolescents where the delay to the identification of disorders and treatment is extensive.

Ongoing surveys throughout the pandemic, such as the Kaiser Family Foundation which has tracked people's overall sense of wellbeing, find that there are dramatically increased rates of people reporting anxiety, depression or declining mental health.

State added that their waitlists at UCSF are essentially closed due to the high influx of mentally ill patients seeking care.

"The waitlist to get an evaluation for autism is more than a year, and getting into our general psychiatric clinic is a year," he said. "The demand went from overwhelming to beyond overwhelming in the last couple of years."

Yet there have been notable positives since the start of the pandemic. The introduction of telehealth allowed health care facilities greater accessibility to see patients while mitigating exposure to COVID-19.

Despite the current obstacles his team faces, family members and colleagues describe him as a charismatic leader with an amazing ability to effectively communicate his research.

Stephan Sanders, an associate professor of psychiatry at UCSF and a close colleague of State, said that there are not many people that he would choose to work with for 15 years, but State is one in a million.

"He is just a fundamentally good person," Sanders said. "If there is an ethical decision to be made, he is always on the right side of it."

Sanders also mentioned State's ability to lead a team is an integral and inspiring part of working with him.

His sister, Rosanne State, 62, said she sees Matthew as an original thinker following in his father's footsteps.

"My brother was a department chair; my dad was a department chair. My dad was an MD, PhD; my brother is an MD, PhD. . . I really always say that he is carrying my dad's torch," Rosanne said.

State started his professional career in politics and spent time in Washington D.C., but his experiences there convinced him he was better suited and more enthusiastic about helping others in the world one patient at a time.