he was kept in the hospital three weeks for observation. His mother, Janie Garcia, remembers being afraid for her child and said it is something she will never forget.

“I just felt so helpless. I couldn't do anything but cry. I became so anxious about the situation that I couldn't even think straight,” she said. "Unless someone experiences it, they can't understand the pain and anguish a mother goes through when her son is fighting for his life, and she has no idea what the outcome will be.”

From the reasons that are known to cause preterm labor, the most common ones are infection and gestational diabetes.

Wheeler emphasized the importance of having good obstetrical visits. He said that if a woman develops signs of preterm labor, she should go to the hospital instead of waiting. If she shows up early, there are medicines that doctors can give her to slow down labor. But once she's dilated, it can't be reversed.

Robert Sandoval’s daughter, Emily, was born a month and a half premature. Sandoval believes his wife delivered early because of preterm labor, the most common ones are infection and gestational diabetes.

“Growing up with Gage, I’ve learned from my own bodies. Doctors advise that expectant mothers go to all their scheduled doctor’s appointments and tell their doctors if they are having any symptoms that may concern them. These signs are sometimes early warnings. Doctors may be able to deal with problems if they’re caught early, increasing the chances of having a healthy full term baby.

“After all, children are our future,” Sandoval said.

Waco nonprofits provide aid, resources for autistic children

Today 67 children in the United States will be diagnosed with autism: more than AIDS, juvenile diabetes and cancer combined. With so many children and families affected by the disorder, the Waco community has come together to help.

Autism is a disease that affects the brain. It is characterized by impaired social interaction and communication skills and repetitive behaviors, according to Autism Speaks, an autism advocacy organization.

Today autism affects one in 93 children, which is an increase from two years ago when the rate of autism was one in 150 children, according to Autism Speaks studies.

Sarah Skipper, a senior psychology major at Baylor, has a 14-year-old autistic brother named Gage.

“Growing up with Gage taught me the value of patience, understanding and courage,” she said.

Skipper said she plans to go to graduate school in clinical psychology to focus on autism research so in the future she can help other autistic children and their families.

“I believe that the general public may not completely understand and is quick to think that all autistic children are dealing with the same issues,” Skipper said. “It is important that the public realizes that although there are general characteristics of autism, it affects each child differently.”

Baylor library information specialist Laura Sumrall is a mother of three, including a 10-year-old son with autism.

“We need so much help to find a cure and to support the generation that is being diagnosed now and have been diagnosed in the past 10 years,” she said. “These folks can contribute in a positive manner and do not need to be shunned.”

“We have been so overwhelmed and thankful for the resources we've been blessed with through the love and care he has received the past six years, from the incredible bus ladies, to the outstanding teachers he’s had.”

The Baylor Autism Resource Center, located on Baylor’s campus, is a place where children with autism and their parents can go to learn about the disorder. The center also provides social skill groups, resources, training workshops for educators, parents and paraprofessionals, and aid to those affected by the disorder throughout Central Texas.

“The center is a safe, controlled environment that helps autistic children practice skills,” Ney said. “Our hope is that they go out in the community and use the skills they are learning here.”

Waco is also home to a large support group called the Heart of Texas Autism Network. Ney considered it as a strong support group for children and families that are living with autism.

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Currently there is no definitive answer to the cause of autism or a cure, said Dr. Julie Ivey, director and founder of The Baylor Autism Resource Center.

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