A Word From Our Director

The summer is over and we are looking forward to cool autumnal breezes and exciting new activity in the Center. In addition to the changing color of leaves, the Center will be introducing our patients and readers to several new faces at the Center----our new junior MS Fellow, Pavle Repovic, MD, PhD; a visiting medical student from Germany, Svenja Oynhausen; two excellent volunteers—Kaysi Franceus, an NYU undergraduate interested in medical school, who is helping out Jennifer Decker and who has been instrumental in organizing patients’ MRIs (please see MRI article, page 6); and Kate Barron, who is studying at Columbia and who is helping out Dr. DeAngelis and the research team.

Keynote Article
Changing Trends in the Incidence of Multiple Sclerosis
Tracy DeAngelis, MD

This past May 2008, the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society of Barbados invited me to travel to Barbados to give a public educational seminar for their MS Activities week. I must confess, initially, I was surprised to learn that the number of people with MS living in Barbados was estimated to be as high as approximately 95 in a population of about 268,000. My surprised response finds its roots in the classical understanding that the worldwide distribution of MS, generally considered a predominantly Northern European disease, tends to spare equatorial regions, such as the Caribbean. Recent epidemiological studies, however, have found that this geographical distribution pattern may be decreasing and such changes may provide clues to unraveling the mystery of what causes MS.

MS affects approximately 400,000 people in the United States and is considered the most common neurological cause of disability in young people. Worldwide, as a general rule, MS has been found to occur with much greater frequency (specifically more than 30 cases per 100,000 persons) above 40 degrees latitude than closer to the equator, although prevalence rates can differ significantly within a particular geographic area, suggesting that geographical factors are only one part of the story. Early epidemiological studies of MS established that the incidence of MS tends to increase at a distance from the equator (see map insert, page 3).

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A Word From Our Director
Continued from page 1

Our Keynote Article has been written by Dr. Tracy DeAngelis, who was invited to Barbados, where she was featured on “Mornin’ Barbados” (a television show) and presented a lecture to a large audience of people interested in MS. Dr. DeAngelis will discuss her visit as well as her insight on epidemiological factors and MS.

I am pleased to report that I was awarded NIH/NINDS funding for an extension of our CombiRx study for an additional four years. This extension will allow us to provide even better follow-up for the participants of this important study, which is exploring the mechanisms of using two disease modifying medications to combat the progression of multiple sclerosis. We also will now be able to better study the nature of progressive disease.

Another returning face with new responsibilities is the addition of Dr. Stephen Krieger as an attending physician. Dr. Krieger was a Sylvia Lawry Fellow at the Center for two years and as of July 1, 2008 has joined the Center faculty as Assistant Professor. He will be seeing patients and will become increasingly involved with educational endeavors. (Please see the article about him inside, page 5).

Two other new developments for The Mount Sinai Medical Center are the appointment of Dr. Eric Nestler, as the head of the new Brain Institute (see article, page 8) and the advent of the Biobank at Mount Sinai (an article explains the significance of both of these exciting advances, pages 8-9).

We are pleased to announce a brand new resource, the Sternlicht Fund, initiated by a benefactor of the Center in honor of his wife to help fund the educational costs of MS Fellows.

We are also proud to share that Dr. Aaron Miller’s nurse practitioner, Jennifer Decker, is now a certified MS nurse, which is an additional level of certification successfully achieved at the most recent MS Consortium meetings in Denver, this past May 2008. Congratulations, Jen!

Once again we are continuing our After-Hours Seminars, the fourth Wednesday of each month, except as noted (please see the 2008-2009 schedule inside, page 12). Richard Cohen, writer, best-selling author, journalist and WABC radio host, will be the inaugural speaker for the 2008-2009 seminar series, Wednesday, September 24th, 2008 (5:30-7 PM), 1468 Madison Avenue, Annenberg Building, Room 13-01.

We have our quarterly Social Workers’ Tip, which addresses available resources for patients and their loved ones. We advocate patients to be proactive and want to offer ways to do just that.

In this edition, we are also alerting you to two fun and informative events being sponsored by two outstanding organizations. The first is the Fourth Annual Texas Hold ‘Em Poker Tournament, sponsored by the MS Hope for a Cure Foundation and the World Poker Tournament in support of MS. This event takes place on Wednesday, September 17th, 2008 (see page 6). The other event is a Research Symposium sponsored by the NYC Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, on Sunday, September 21, 2008. Our own Dr. Stephen Krieger is one of the Keynote Speakers and we are sure this will be another exceptional research symposium (please see inside for more information, page 9).

Hope to see you all soon.

Best,

Fred D. Lublin, MD
Saunders Family Professor of Neurology
Director, The Corinne Goldsmith Dickinson Center for Multiple Sclerosis
This apparent latitudinal gradient affecting disease susceptibility implied the possibility that an environmental factor(s) might trigger the disease in people with certain genetic background(s). Migration studies supporting this latitudinal effect have demonstrated that moving from one geographic area to another seems to alter a person’s risk of developing MS. Specifically, immigrants and their descendants appear to acquire the risk level, either high or low, of the area to which they move. This acquired risk also appears to be age-related with those moving early in life, specifically before age 15, taking on the risk of the new area, whereas those moving later in life seem to retain the risk of origin. In the latter case, the acquired risk may not appear until the next generation. These observations have led to the development of intriguing theories about the cause of MS, such as differential sunlight exposure leading to variations in vitamin D levels or particular viral infections as potential culprits. None, however, have ever been substantiated with any definitive scientific evidence. To date, despite such alluring clues, MS researchers continue to be eluded by the cause(s) of MS.

Pieces of this complex puzzle, however, are under continual, vigorous investigation and some recent studies have called the classical epidemiological views of MS into question. Evidence from two studies suggests that the gradient of MS incidence may be decreasing or possibly that it never truly existed in certain areas. In light of these findings, Alonso and Hernan from the University of Minnesota conducted a systematic review of incidence studies of MS from 1966 to February of 2007 and reported their findings in Neurology, July 2008. Their review concluded that the latitudinal gradient present in early studies appears to be decreasing over the last 25 years, as a result of increased incidence of MS in regions closer to the equator.
Some possible explanations offered for this observed change included less sunlight exposure and hence, possibly lower vitamin D synthesis, as well as less exposure to infections in early life. The latter theory, often referred to as the hygiene hypothesis, suggests that a decreased exposure to infections during childhood, often seen in areas of higher socioeconomic development, increases the risk of autoimmune disease. Recent improvements in the socioeconomic conditions of regions in southern Europe and the United States may have eliminated early exposure to infections and increased risk for autoimmunity.

While these discussions are intriguing, it is very important to emphasize that they are solely theories. Moreover, while epidemiological studies help MS clinicians and scientists develop research hypotheses about what causes MS, they cannot be interpreted as proof of the aforementioned theories. They simply help scientists try to formulate the right questions to address in studies. Of note, Alonso and Hernan also found that the female to male ratio in MS incidence over time appears to have increased over the last five decades.

Using the MS Society of Barbados’ statistic estimating 95 cases of MS in a population of 268,000, the prevalence rate does appear high, specifically over 30 cases per 100,000. In addition to the epidemiological observations discussed above, other explanations for this high prevalence in Barbados could be genetic admixture among the native population with those of Northern European ancestry as well as diagnostic confusion with diseases more commonly found in equatorial regions that mimic MS, such as a condition called tropical spastic paraparesis caused by the viral infection, HTLV.

I would like to thank the MS Society of Barbados for giving me the opportunity to participate in their MS Activities Week and help raise awareness in their community about diagnosis, treatment and available local resources for those coping with the disease. It was a uniquely educational experience for me to interact with and gain a greater understanding of how MS patients in Barbados manage symptoms in the unforgiving heat intolerance of a tropical climate. Just as I have found here in my daily encounters at the CGD Center, MS patients and their physicians from Barbados similarly impressed me with insights into how MS affects their daily lives as well as thought-provoking questions regarding new diagnostic approaches and therapeutic strategies. Furthermore, I was impressed by their courage and fortitude to face the daily challenges of living with and treating MS and particularly their strength to organize a supportive environment for the growing education and advocacy of their patient population. In short, my trip to Barbados was a welcome reminder of the international collaborative effort taking place across the globe towards finding a cure for MS.
CGD faculty, and began seeing patients this summer. In addition to his clinical work, he has an appointment as Assistant Professor of Neurology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, where he will be responsible for enhancing the Department’s educational program for students and residents. Dr. Krieger will be seeing patients for follow-up on Monday and Tuesday evenings, extending the CGD Center’s hours for those patients who prefer an after-hours appointment.

Meet Svenja Oynhausen—A visiting Medical Student from Germany

Svenja Oynhausen is a visiting medical student from the University of Cologne Medical School in Germany, who will be spending the 2008-2009 academic year at the CGD Center doing work for her graduate medical thesis. She will be working on a project evaluating how patients with multiple sclerosis receive acute medical care, including visits to the emergency department (ER) and inpatient hospital stays. By looking carefully at the needs of our MS patients, and the resources that are warranted to care for them, we hope to establish ways to further enhance our ability to do so. Svenja’s research may also help to raise awareness of MS-healthcare needs in the medical community. We are excited to have her as part of the CGD research team!
Medication Packaging Update

There is new prescription safety information for Mitoxantrone (also known as Novantrone). It is recommended that people who have used this medication have yearly cardiac monitoring. More specifically, the FDA recommends a follow-up quantitative evaluation of the left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF) using an appropriate methodology (e.g., echocardiogram, multi-gated radionuclide angiography (MUGA), cardiac MRI). These recommendations are offered as a safety precaution.

For more information or to discuss this further, please give us a call (212-241-6854, option 4).

MRIs at The CGD Center

We at The Corinne Goldsmith Dickinson Center for Multiple Sclerosis are doing our best to reduce our need for additional space. Space is at a premium at Mount Sinai. Therefore, we are trying to alert people who have MRIs at the Center. We would like to return your MRIs to you. While we would appreciate people picking up their MRIs and keeping them themselves, we know this is not always possible. We will be happy to mail your MRIs to you. We would like to hear from you at your earliest convenience. Our next option will be to send your MRIs to storage if we do not hear from you.

Thank you for your understanding. If you have any questions, please call Donna (212-241-6854, option 6) to discuss your MRIs.

Social Workers’ Tip of the Month:
Helping You Help Yourself

Did you know that the MS Society provides free booklets to patients on a variety of relevant topics? Some examples include:

- **Employment Issues**—learn about American Disability Act (ADA) rights and strategies, as well as symptom management techniques on the job, and advice about disclosure on the job.
- **Fatigue**—what you should know, a practical guide.
- **Sleep Disorders and MS**

Call your local chapter or the 800 number (1-800-344-4867) to obtain free copies of these materials and so much more. The NMSS is an excellent source and resource for further information.
Fred Lublin, MD, Elected Chair of Clinical Advisory Committee

Dr. Fred D. Lublin, Director of the CGD Center for MS, was elected Chair of the Clinical Advisory Committee (CAC) of the New York City Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. The CAC, a multidisciplinary group, is responsible for oversight and approval of all public and professional education programs and services offered at the chapter level. It consists of care center clinicians, MS specialists, and professionals from the community.

Among Dr. Lublin’s numerous activities in professional organizations, he also serves as Deputy Medical Director of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, and is a member of its National Board of Directors.

2009 MS WALK—JOIN OUR TEAM—The CGD Center for Multiple Sclerosis at Mount Sinai

Tova Epstein and Aliza Ben-Zacharia are our Team Captains. In 2008, we were the 11th fundraising team overall!! Pretty impressive—but we always want to do better….. We would love to have you join our team in 2009.

In 2008, the CGD Center started its own team and did not do too poorly as a first time out team. Previously we walked under the leadership of EJ Levy, who went on to start her own foundation—MS Hope For A Cure (see the article regarding the Poker Tournament sponsored by her foundation and the World Poker Tournament (WPT), page 6). We are starting early this year. Come join our team, rather than forming your own. It is a fun way to get together with a group of great people—make money for a good cause, make friends and help us become the number one team (like we used to be when we were with EJ’s Team). Speak to Tova or Aliza on how to join our team.

Innovative Philanthropy: A Sternlicht Family Gift

The Corinne Goldsmith Dickinson Center for Multiple Sclerosis is the recipient of a recent gift which will have lasting impact on patients and faculty alike. The Missy Sternlicht MS Clinical Research Fellowship Fund was created in April 2008 with a generous contribution from Russell Sternlicht in honor of his wife and in celebration of her birthday.

The MS Center is actively engaged in training tomorrow’s finest specialists in the field of MS. This new fund will be used to support these outstanding post-doctoral fellows and provide the specialized training and skills necessary to deliver innovative MS care in the 21st century. In establishing this fund, it is intended that future gifts from the Sternlichts, their family and friends, as well as other similarly interested donors, will sustain this effort and provide financing for clinical research fellows over the years to come.

“I felt it was not only in the best interest of the Center, but at a very personal level, in my family’s interest, to help advance what we know today about this disease,” Russell Sternlicht said. “My goal was to enable many others to ultimately benefit from new findings in applied research and potential new therapies.”

Directed philanthropy like the Missy Sternlicht MS Clinical Research Fellowship Fund is one of the many ways individuals can play a role in the future of the CGD Center, while supporting specific areas of interest. With your help, the CGD Center can continue to attract the best and the brightest minds, and remain a world leader in MS research and patient care.

Contact Kim Woodward, Director of Development, at (212) 659-1594 to learn more about ways to contribute.
Eric Nestler, MD, PhD, Named Director of the Brain Institute

Eric J. Nestler, MD, PhD, has joined Mount Sinai School of Medicine as Director of the Brain Institute and Chairman of Neuroscience. The Brain Institute is one of 12 translational research centers to be launched at Mount Sinai to promote a multidisciplinary approach to research, education, and patient care.

Dr. Nestler possesses an unusual combination of medical expertise: he is a world-renowned neuroscientist, molecular biologist, and a psychiatrist. “I am very interested in neural repair, which will be a focus for the new Brain Institute,” said Dr. Nestler. “Diseases like Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s disease, Lou Gehrig’s disease, and multiple sclerosis involve actual damage to nerve cells and supporting cell types that are present in the brain. What I think has been so interesting is that schizophrenia, depression, addiction, and autism also appear to involve injury to the brain. This is a common theme that cuts across diverse brain diseases and includes the potential of neural repair in treating them.” Neural repair will be a focus of the new Brain Institute.

Prior to joining Mount Sinai, Dr. Nestler was the Lou and Ellen McGinley Distinguished Professor and Chairman of the department of Psychiatry and professor in the department of Neuroscience at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. Before moving to Texas, Dr. Nestler spent 27 years at Yale, where he received his undergraduate, postdoctorate, and medical degrees.

A leader in a unique field, Dr. Nestler is a member of the Institute of Medicine and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Currently he serves on the Scientific Advisory Boards of the National Alliance for Research in Schizophrenia and Depression.

“When you look at Mount Sinai, its departments of Psychiatry and Neurology rank very high in National Institutes of Health funding,” says Dr. Nestler. “Mount Sinai’s basic neuroscience program is already extremely strong. Put this all together and we are poised to produce some amazing work.”

Volunteers Wanted: Help Unlock Genetic Mysteries

Patients of the Corinne Goldsmith Dickinson Center for MS can now take part in an exciting program which will provide a great benefit to medical science. Biobank is now accepting blood samples from volunteer patients across Mount Sinai Medical Center, which is one of the first institutions nationwide to establish a biobank program on such a large scale.

Biobank is a highly confidential database of blood samples (DNA) and medical history, which will be used by researchers to discover genetic links to disease, detection, and drug response -- with the future goal of improving healthcare at a very individualized level. The project is funded by the Charles Bronfman Institute for Personalized Medicine at Mount Sinai.

Thanks to breakthroughs in biomedical information, scientists have the genetic code of different diseases and genetic variations within large populations. Soon, researchers may be able to relate this information to the individual, and learn how genetic variations may contribute to disease.

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It’s important to know that participants will not receive their personal results. Information from the samples will be studied (anonymously) to draw valuable medical insight, such as which groups of people might be at risk for neurologic disorders, or why one drug works for one person, but not for another. While participation will not immediately benefit the volunteer, their small two-tablespoon blood sample may greatly benefit future generations and the community at large.

All collected samples and medical history will be identified only by code, to insure confidentiality. In fact, the National Institutes of Health gave Biobank a “Certificate of Confidentiality” to support its stringent privacy policies.

Patients may volunteer at their next appointment at the CGD Center. Tell your doctor or any of our staff that you are interested, and a Biobank coordinator will meet with you; or contact Christine Hannigan at (212) 241-7858, or Shelly Phelps at (212) 241-3391 at the CGD Center to answer any questions. Through your important role in this project, scientists will gain a better understanding of the factors that cause disease and responsive treatment.

Mount Sinai School of Medicine GCO# 07-0529
IRB-Approved though 07/10/09

The New York City Chapter of the National MS Society presents:

2008 Annual Research Symposium
To Repair and Protect the Nervous System: The Future of MS Treatments

Sunday, September 21, 2008
12:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.
The Sol and Lillian Goldman Building
Lighthouse International
111 East 59th Street
(Between Park and Lexington Avenues)
New York, NY 10022

This half-day educational program is one of the most popular public education programs offered by the NYC Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. This year’s topic is Nervous System Protection and Repair: The Future of MS Treatments. The brain’s capacity to repair itself is remarkable, but is significantly hindered by MS. In this program, experts will discuss a range of repair and protection strategies on the horizon. They include:
• Stimulating the brain’s own capacity for repair
• Transplanting new cells to protect and repair central nervous system tissues
• Using technology to track the effectiveness of new repair therapies.

The keynote speakers will be Marie Filbin, Ph.D., who is a distinguished professor and director of the Specialized Neuroscience Research Program at Hunter College, City University of New York in Manhattan and Stephen Krieger, M.D., of the Corinne Goldsmith Dickinson Center for Multiple Sclerosis at Mount Sinai Medical Center.

Family members and friends are encouraged to attend. Registration is free and includes lunch.

For more information or to register, please contact the Information Resource Center at 212-463-7787, option 1.
Dr. Miller and Family Visit China in Honor of His Birthday

We arrived in Beijing Sunday after an uneventful trip—except for the 3-hour flight delay because of late arriving aircraft.

We have a charming guide and are enjoying the sights of Beijing. I thought you might enjoy a few pictures of our early experiences:

Our first meal in China—choose from scorpions, grasshoppers, beetles, etc.

The Miller Family in front of the Forbidden City—truly massive in scope.

Climbing the Great Wall in the mist. It’s actually quite strenuous and an amazing feat of construction. Although the fog, which later partially cleared, significantly reduced our view of its snaking into the distance, we greatly preferred the cool fog than a blazing hot sunny day, which would have made the climb very arduous for us less than perfectly conditioned old folks.

Since my last e-mail we’ve been to Xian, home of the Terra Cotta Warriors, an army of 8,000 or so lifesize figures that were constructed for the tomb of the first emperor of China roughly 2,300 years ago. They lay buried for over 2,200 years until discovered in 1974. About 1,000 have now been pieced together, each one different—amazing. We’re now in Shanghai, which is like a giant version of New York (or maybe a bit like Las Vegas). The skyline is incredible and the building is incessant.
The above and below pictures are the Terra Cotta Warriors that were part of the tomb of the first emperor of China.

We are now in Hangzhou, a beautiful city on a lake, located less than 2 hours from Shanghai. In the morning we fly to Guilin, a place in southern China that is the site of many of the beautiful landscapes of China that one often sees depicted.

We’re having a terrific time seeing some of the old China, but this country is definitely becoming more and more westernized.

We’ve arrived in Hong Kong for the last leg of a wonderful journey. It was an amazing change to go yesterday from hiking up a mountain full of rice paddies and primitive homes of ethnic minority Chinese to the skyscrapers and 5th Avenue atmosphere of Hong Kong.

There are cranes everywhere (and they don’t seem to be falling down!). There are a mere 18 million people here.

The last picture is of the Shanghai skyline. Shanghai now rivals NYC in skyscrapers and its building boom is unbelievable.
A conversation with Richard Cohen
Best-selling author, journalist, and WABC radio host

The CGD Center for MS After Hours Seminars 2008-2009
Fourth Wednesday of Each Month (except when noted**)

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Please call to sign up as soon as possible—212-241-6854, option 6.
Free to Attend—Light Refreshments provided

MS Interactions newsletters and After-Hours Seminars supported in part by grants from Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals and Biogen Idec.