

Existing medication offers new hope



Society seizes opportunities to advance solutions for progressive MS

by Heather Lee



Katie Jennings

Katie Jennings is one of thousands of people living with progressive MS. At the time of her diagnosis last December, her doctor gave her news she didn't expect: "There are two forms of MS. One can be treated very effectively. One has no approved treatment. You seem to have the latter. We'll hope for the best."

Katie's experience at the time of her diagnosis is one shared by countless others in the MS community with progressive MS. "Hope for the best" is not the advice she wanted to hear from her physician. "I wanted a solution. Right now. Before anything progressed anywhere," says Katie, who blogs about her experiences at msconnection.org.

A lack of available treatments to combat progression and restore function shouldn't be one more thing people living with progressive MS have to face.

The Society recently invested \$600,000 in funding for a clinical trial of oral ibudilast in 250 people with progressive MS, conducted by researchers at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Ohio. Ibudilast has been successfully used to treat cerebrovascular disorders and asthma in Japan and Korea because of its immunosuppressive qualities. In a previous trial of 292 people with relapsing MS, some evidence that ibudilast could protect the nervous system from damage was observed. Examining and repurposing the neuroprotective potential of existing therapies like ibudilast is just one of many innovative approaches the Society is taking to speed treatments to people with progressive forms of MS.

The Society actively advocated for this trial by encouraging funding support from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and by facilitating collaboration among other parties: the NeuroNEXT Network, a clinical trials initiative of the NIH; the Cleveland Clinic Foundation research team; and MediciNova, the company that is supplying ibudilast. The Society provided additional funding because of our commitment to finding solutions for everyone affected by MS, including those with progressive forms. The trial may answer important questions about the best ways to measure the benefits of therapies aimed at protecting the nervous system from MS. Additional information about how to volunteer for this trial will be provided when the NeuroNEXT Network centers are ready to begin recruiting participants.

We know there is no time to waste in discovering potential solutions. "Having a progressive disease, however slowly it's progressing, feels like living on borrowed time. I hope that for me and for all of us with progressive MS, there will be time enough to find some answers," says Katie. The Society will continue to drive collaboration and make strategic investments in initiatives like ibudilast to uncover answers and improve the lives of everyone with MS.