

Working 2 Walk Symposium Speakers

Andrea Behrman, PhD, PT, Associate Professor, University of Florida Dept of Physical Therapy

Dr. Behrman's clinical and research careers have focused on adult neuro-rehabilitation. She has combined her clinical expertise as a physical therapist with principles of motor learning and control to develop and assess therapeutic interventions for persons with movement disorders secondary to spinal cord injury, stroke, and Parkinson's Disease.

Andrew R. Blight, Ph.D., Chief Scientific Officer, Acorda Therapeutics

Dr. Blight has been the Chief Scientific Officer at Acorda since January 2004. Dr. Blight is a leader in SCI pathophysiology research and has made several important contributions to the field, particularly on the role of demyelination in SCI. He pioneered the therapeutic application of 4-AP in SCI animal models and in human clinical trials.

Marie T. Filbin, Ph.D, Distinguished Professor, Hunter College, New York

Dr. Filbin directs the Specialized Neuroscience Research Program at Hunter College. She has earned international recognition for her studies aimed at reversing paralysis. She discovered a key molecule (MAG) in the myelin that insulates nerve cells. MAG inhibits nerve re-growth. Her more recent work has shown how this inhibition to re-growth may be overcome.

James D. Guest, M.D., Ph.D., FACS, FRCS (C), Department of Neurological Surgery, Miami Project

Dr. Guest is an assistant Professor of Neurological Surgery at the Miami Veterans Affairs Medical Center. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada, and was awarded a fellowship at the Barrow Neurologic Institute in Phoenix, Arizona. Dr. Guest's clinical interests include spinal cord injury, central nervous system pain, cervical radiculopathy and back pain. His research focuses on cellular therapy for spinal cord injury, mechanisms of secondary injury and gene therapy.

Susan Harkema, PhD, Associate Professor and Rehabilitation Research Director, University of Louisville, Frazier Rehab Institute

Dr. Harkema's research focuses on neural plasticity and specifically addresses the spinal cord's capacity to "re-learn." By designing and applying rehabilitative therapies that re-teach patients to step and to walk, then measuring the effect of the activity on the nervous system's ability to change over time, she hopes to capitalize on the spinal cord's tremendous potential to play a role in improved function after injury.

Hans Keirstead, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Reeve-Irvine Research Center

Dr. Keirstead directs a large team investigating the cellular biology and treatment of spinal cord trauma, research that also has significance for multiple sclerosis and other diseases of the nervous system. In order to bring his treatments to clinical trials, he has founded or partnered with biotechnology companies to fund and conduct pre-clinical and clinical development.

Naomi Kleitman, Ph.D., Program Director, Extramural Research Program, NIH/NINDS

With NINDS since 2001, Dr. Kleitman focuses on spinal cord injury research and developing successful methods to restore function by repairing the central nervous system. Bringing the basic research on neural repair and axonal growth to clinical studies is a major goal. As the Scientific Liaison for the Miami Project, she encouraged interaction between clinicians, rehabilitation and basic researchers, as well as informing the public, patient groups, and the media about progress in spinal cord injury research.

Daniel P. Lammertse, M.D., Medical Director, Craig Hospital

Dr. Lammertse came to Craig Hospital in 1981 and has served as Medical Director since 1984. He is board certified in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and has a sub-specialty certification in spinal cord injury. He is the project director of the Rocky Mountain Regional Spinal Cord Injury System and serves as President of the American Spinal Injury Association and as the Chair of the NIDRR SCI Model Systems Project Directors Committee. Dr. Lammertse is internationally recognized as an expert in spinal cord injury rehabilitation.

John W. McDonald, M.D., Ph.D., Director of the International Center of Spinal Cord Injury, Kennedy Krieger Institute & Johns Hopkins University

Dr. McDonald joined Kennedy Krieger Institute in 2004 in order to launch a brand-new spinal cord rehabilitation and research program with a focus on pediatric paralysis. In his previous position as Medical Director at Washington University, he spearheaded development of what is now a leading spinal cord injury neuralrestoration program. It was there that he developed the "activity-based restoration" (ABR) therapies designed to help patients with long-term spinal cord injuries recover sensation, movement and independence.

Dr. Jane Roskams, Associate Professor, University of British Columbia

Dr. Roskam's lab at UBC focuses on the regulation of normal and abnormal nervous system development. Their objective is determining how to use these mechanisms to stimulate nervous system cells to regenerate after they are damaged. These studies utilize cells from the olfactory system; such cells are the only CNS neurons known to be capable of replacing themselves and re-targeting their axons successfully following injury.

Oswald Steward, Ph.D., Director, Reeve-Irvine Research Center

Dr. Steward holds the "Reeve-Irvine Chair in Spinal Cord Injury Research" at the University of California at Irvine. UCI recruited him to be the founding Director of the Reeve-Irvine Research Center in 1999, established to study injuries to and diseases of the spinal cord and develop strategies to promote repair and regeneration of nerve cells. The Center aims to promote the coordination and cooperation of scientists around the world who are seeking a cure for diseases affecting the spinal cord.

Steve Williams, MD, Assistant Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine, New England Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center

Dr. Williams is the Principal Investigator of the New England Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center's model spinal cord systems grant from NIDRR. His research interests are emerging technologies in rehabilitation and neurogenic bone metabolism in spinal cord injury. Dr. Williams passionately believes that informed patients receive the best care and tirelessly works towards ensuring that people with spinal cord injury receive accurate and up-to-date information regarding clinical trials and treatments.

Wise Young, PhD, MD, Cell Biology & Neuroscience Director, Rutgers University.

Dr. Young is Director of the W M Keck Center for Collaborative Neuroscience at Rutgers University. He was part of the team that discovered and established high-dose methylprednisolone (MP) as the first effective therapy for acute spinal cord injuries. Dr. Young developed the first standardized rat spinal cord injury model used worldwide for testing therapies, formed the first consortium funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to test promising therapies, and helped establish several widely accepted clinical outcome measures in cord injury research. He is founder of the Care Cure Community, an online forum of information for patients, caregivers and anyone interested in spinal cord injury and other neurological disorders.

Advocate Testimonials

Josh Basile – Josh suffered a C-5 injury when overtaken by a wave while on a family vacation at Bethany Beach. Since his injury in 2004, Josh has become a relentless advocate for beach safety and for research into a cure. He has worked out intensively at Kennedy Krieger Institute to maximize his return of function, and continues to make progress in his recovery.

Joseph Briseno – Two years ago, Joseph's son, Jay, was severely injured by a random bullet while serving in Iraq. A very close family, the Brisenos refused to institutionalize their son. Instead, they elected to set up an intensive care unit in their basement so Jay could live at home. Joseph left his job to help care for Jay and become an advocate for the cure.

Kelly Giannattasio – Kelly became a T-6 paraplegic after a car accident 7 years ago. She now works as a travel agent as well as public speaker for the Think First Foundation, a national brain and spinal cord injury prevention program for kids and teens. Kelly is a former Miss Wheelchair Missouri.

Danny Heumann – Danny was paralyzed in an auto accident on August 13, 1985, 2 weeks before he was to begin his freshman year at Syracuse University. He later returned to graduate from Syracuse, and also received his JD from the Washington College of Law at American University. He is the Vice President of the Daniel Heumann Fund for Spinal Cord Research. In 2005 he created a grassroots coalition, Michigan Citizens for Stem Cell Research and Cures. Danny plays wheelchair tennis, is married with a daughter Katie who is 2 1/2, and travels the country as a motivational speaker.

Marilyn Smith – Marilyn's son Noah suffered a C-7 injury 3 years ago when a wheel came off an oncoming vehicle and flew into the cab of his pickup. Always an activist, Marilyn has turned her energies to the cure effort since Noah's injury. After serving on the organizing committee for last year's "Spring Into Action" Rally, she helped found Unite 2 Fight Paralysis.