



**MS Learn Online  
Feature Presentation  
National MS Society's Research Program  
Featuring Dr. Richard Rudick**

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**>>Kate Milliken:** Hello. I'm Kate Milliken, and welcome to MS Learn Online. To achieve the vision of a world free of MS, the National MS Society is a driving force of MS research, relentlessly pursuing prevention, treatment and cure. The Society devotes nearly \$50 million each year to a spectrum of key initiatives and research projects. Dr. Richard Rudick is here to talk with us about the areas of research focus at the Society. Dr. Rudick chairs the Research Programs Advisory Committee for the Society and is the Director of the Mellen Center for Multiple Sclerosis Treatment and Research at the Cleveland Clinic.

Welcome to MS Learn Online, Dr. Rudick. What are some of the current research areas that you guys are focusing on with your Committee?

**>>Richard Rudick:** The MS Society funds research in a broad spectrum of MS research. Funding programs from understanding the causes of MS, how the brain tissue is injured during the process, how it might be repaired by the body, ranging through how MS is measured with MRI or with blood tests through what can be done about it, treatment of MS itself, treatment of the symptoms of MS, ranging all the way through to what is called health services research, where we study questions such as how do MS patients get their care? What services do they need? What happens to them over time? So, those are the research programs.

And the other major category that the Society funds is training, education and training, and that is done in a variety of ways. But it is very important to take a long view, and that involves training the next generation of people to solve the disease.

>>**Kate Milliken:** How do you decide to do the research that you do, which projects you pick out and choose?

>>**Richard Rudick:** Well, there are two categories. There are priority programs that the MS Society and its advisors determine are very important. So, an example of that would be the program to look into MS in children. Not that many children get MS compared with adults, and so it's been under-studied. So, the MS Society and its advisors and committees will determine this is an area of importance. So, there are categories of directed research, such as the children's program.

The majority, though, comes from investigators who propose research in what's called an investigator initiated research proposal, and those projects come in twice a year in the form of applications for funding with the research fully described and justified, and then they go through what's called peer review. And there are four peer review committees that divide the research proposals according to the category, and they sit around and two or three reviewers read each proposal in great detail, everything is discussed. There is a vote about the importance of each project, and the Society then funds as many as possible going down the priority list.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Has there been an impact with the research that you have done with your committee on MS in general?

>>**Richard Rudick:** I think that there has been tremendous progress in the MS field in the past 20 years. Some of it has been driven by understanding of the disease, how it actually works, how the tissue is damaged in the first place. Some of it has to do with advances in treating the disease. We now have multiple drugs that can slow the progression of disease and make a big difference over time. Some of it has to do with how we monitor and measure patients with MS. The MRI has played a huge role in developing new opportunities for people with MS, new research strategies. So, I would say that the MS Society has played a key role in funding all of those initiatives.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Obviously there is a lot of collaboration between the MS Society and researchers. Why is this an important partnership?

>>**Richard Rudick:** I think the MS Society is partnering with the research community as well as other organizations that are interested in solving the MS

problem, organizations such as the National Institutes of Health, the FDA, other not-for-profits that are attempting to solve the MS problem, and industry. Industry is a very important partner for the research community as well as the not-for-profits. It is really important to collaborate on research because it's a -- MS is a very difficult problem, and this will take teamwork, collaboration and support across these organizations. So, the MS Society really fosters that type of collaboration.

>>**Kate Milliken:** And one of the research programs that I have heard about is the Fast Forward Program. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

>>**Richard Rudick:** The Fast Forward Program is very innovative. It's an approach to link the investigator community with the drug and device development industry with investors who wish to invest in philanthropic causes. So, for example, investors will make donations into the program not with the hope of getting great return on their money, but with the hope of getting it back and helping research in the meantime. And the way Fast Forward works is that investigators propose a product or a device that may have commercial value, and then the device or pharmaceutical sponsors help develop the program to determine whether or not that product will be useful. So, it's very innovative. It links research with the commercialization pathway.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Dr. Rudick, thank you for your time. It's really nice to know that there are so many things that are happening that are really moving things forward. Really appreciate it.

This is Kate Milliken for MS Learn Online. Thanks for joining us.