

Amy T. Waldman, MD: tracking children with MS

Amy T. Waldman, MD, brought her energetic style to the National MS Society years ago. “I started volunteering with the Society when I was 11,” she said. “My best friend was the daughter of the chapter president.”

Years later, Amy’s childhood experiences with the Society took root in a medical career. “I decided to go into pediatrics but I was fascinated by neurology, and so I combined the two,” she said. “At Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, I recognized that pediatric MS was an underrepresented field. It was a great niche for me because of the time that I spent with people with MS through the Society.”

Children with MS have already benefited greatly from Amy’s passion and commit-

ment. She helped establish a pediatric MS clinic at CHOP and organized its first MS support group. Now she has received the MS Clinician Scientist Development Award, given jointly by the Society and the American Academy of Neurology to train promising young clinicians in MS clinical research. Her fellowship is funded in part by the Society’s Greater Delaware Valley Chapter.

Amy’s mentors are Laura J. Balcer, MD, MSCE, and Gihan Tennekoon, MD, who are exploring vision loss in people with MS and how it relates to other neurologic functions and quality of life. Amy is applying these studies to children.

“There are few ways to measure outcomes specifically in



Dr. Waldman

children with MS,” she said. “We need sensitive measures that can really monitor how children are doing over time, not just observe them.”

Since acute optic neuritis—inflammation of the optic nerve—is a common MS symptom in children, Amy’s team is using measurements of visual function, such as tests of low-contrast acuity (perception of light gray letters of progressively smaller size on a white background) and OCT (an eye test that measures the integrity of nerve fibers in the optic nerve). They are correlating these results with more common measures of functional abilities, and examining how clinical symptoms relate to quality of life for the children.

“This award has opened so many doors for me,” Amy said. “It’s given me ‘protected’ time to learn how to do proper research. Because of the award, I have established relationships with other scientists in the field. Most importantly, I have more time to focus on my patients and their families.”

Amy has dedicated her talents to the mission of the National MS Society for 20 years now. “Every time I go to an event, I think of how the Society is motivating everyone in the field to do a better job,” she said. “Just receiving this award makes me want to work harder, to be a scientist who can make a difference in the lives of children with MS.”

FRIENDS: Shimon Elimelech, a 17-year-old with MS, and Nicholas Brady, an 8-year-old with MS, at a family weekend sponsored by the Greater Delaware Valley Chapter. For more on Society programs for kids with MS, call 1-866-KIDS W MS.



NADIA PESTRAK