

Multiple Sclerosis International Federation (MSIF) - Stimulating research into the understanding, treatment and cure of MS

MSIF aims to stimulate and facilitate international cooperation and collaboration in research to better understand the nature of MS, to develop better treatment and rehabilitation of people with MS and inform relevant communication and advocacy initiatives. Through the International Medical and Scientific Board (IMSB), a unique group of medical professionals with over 60 experts in multiple sclerosis and its eight man executive committee, MSIF focuses on a number of research programmes and activities to achieve this aim.

We offer several awards for research in MS. In 2007, we launched the McDonald Fellowships, which enabled five young and talented researchers from emerging countries to carry out a 2 year research project in an MS centre of excellence. A further three fellowships were awarded in 2008, worth a total of £400,000. We also awarded seven Du Pré Grants last year, enabling young researchers to learn new skills through collaborative research projects around the world. Last year, we also launched the International Research Meeting Grants to enable greater international cooperation in MS research and supported the Gordon Research Conference on "Development and Diseases of Myelin" in Italy in May 2008 (www.msif.org/en/research/msif_research_awards/index.html).

From 2005 to 2007, MSIF in collaboration with WHO gathered data from 112 countries on the epidemiology of MS and the availability and accessibility of resources to diagnose, inform, treat, support, and rehabilitate people with MS worldwide. The *Atlas of MS* publication and new website were launched in Montreal on September 17 2008 during the World Congress on treatment and research in MS (www.atlasofms.org/index.aspx). The *Atlas of MS* raises awareness and encourages exploration of the validity and robustness of existing data on epidemiology and services available to people with MS.

We have also commissioned a comprehensive report into the Global economic impact of MS, containing data on the personal, social and economic cost of MS that can be used to raise awareness of the high impact of MS and argue for the allocation of scarce resources for the benefit of individuals, communities and society as a whole. We expect the report to be completed by April 2009.

The MSIF Research Alumni Programme was launched in April 2008, to foster a lifelong relationship between alumni and MSIF, promote scientific communication and the formation of a global MS research network. We currently have 36 alumni and the launch event was held during WCTRIMS 2008 in Montreal (www.msif.org/en/research/msif_research_alumni/index.html).

Last year, we developed a Member Society Research funding database with data on annual MS research funding by our member societies. This data will help us and our member societies to determine global funding trends and patterns, inform future research funding decisions and the development of international collaborative initiatives. Furthermore, we are organising an MS Research Coordination meeting for summer 2009, bringing together key players in the global MS medical and scientific community to review global MS research spending and anticipate and prepare for future challenges, trends and opportunities.

Issue 12 of *MS in focus* on Tremor and ataxia is now out. This biannual publication covers a range of topics in MS from pain and spasticity to genetics and stem cells. Most issues are available to download free in English, German and Spanish (www.msif.org/msinfocus). Additionally, we published an online update of *MS: The Guide to Treatment and Management* which provides the most comprehensive evaluation of frequently used treatments in the management of MS (with a new chapter dedicated to unconventional therapies).

We coordinate work of the International Pediatric Multiple Sclerosis Study Group (IPMSSG) whose aim is to optimize worldwide care, education and research in paediatric multiple sclerosis. We have facilitated and part-funded the first Research Symposium of this group to be held in April 2009 (www.ipmssg.org).

Finally, we have been instrumental in setting up and coordinating global activities of the first World MS Day, which will be on the 27 May 2009.

Prof. Alan Thompson
Chairman, IMSB