ANN ROMNEY CENTER
FOR NEUROLOGIC DISEASES
TRANSFORMING
THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE

2015 ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP REPORT
Dear friends and colleagues,

A few short decades ago, multiple sclerosis (MS), Alzheimer’s disease, ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease), Parkinson’s disease, and brain tumors were complete mysteries. Over the past year, the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases has given us many reasons to be hopeful—breaking ground on promising discoveries, creating new interdisciplinary collaborations, and moving us ahead toward cures.

I am so grateful to Ann Romney for her courage and vision, to Drs. Howard Weiner and Dennis Selkoe and their teams for their unwavering commitment, and to our generous supporters, who are with us every step of the way as we work to accelerate prevention, treatments, and cures for neurologic diseases, which affect more than 50 million people worldwide.

My heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you for advancing this life-changing work.

With gratitude,

Elizabeth G. Nabel, MD
President, Brigham and Women’s Health Care
Dear friends,

My journey with multiple sclerosis began with a mixture of fear and disbelief, something everyone goes through when first diagnosed with a neurologic disease. But with the guidance and expertise of my care team at Brigham and Women’s Hospital (BWH), I soon became hopeful again. This inspired me and my family to help do the same for others.

In October 2014, we formally launched the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases at BWH with the goal of accelerating preventions, treatments, and cures for five of the world’s most complex neurologic diseases. We are also building a community of hope for people around the world who, like me, are fighting neurologic diseases. The center is about empowering patients, convening world-renowned scientists, and working together on new treatments and cures. This report highlights an inspiring year and looks forward, offering hope for the future.

I am honored and humbled by the talented researchers at the new center, who are working collaboratively to discover new breakthroughs and imagine new therapies. The outpouring of support from generous donors provides critical resources for some of the most distinguished experts in the field and provides renewed hope that our children and grandchildren will grow up in a world free of these devastating diseases. I am very proud of the collective efforts that inspire hope for the more than 50 million people worldwide who bravely fight neurologic diseases every day. Together, we can create a better future for patients and families around the world.

With warm regards,

Ann Romney

Dr. Weiner gave my family and me reason to feel hopeful—inspiring us to do the same for others. The Ann Romney Center will be about empowering patients, convening world-renowned scientists, and working together to bring new treatments and cures to patients. We can do this.

—ANN ROMNEY
The Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases at Brigham and Women’s Hospital (BWH) is a collaborative global pursuit to accelerate treatments, prevention, and cures for five of the world’s most complex neurologic diseases: multiple sclerosis (MS), Alzheimer’s disease, ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease), Parkinson’s disease, and brain tumors. Formally launched in 2014, the center builds on decades of groundbreaking work in the field and is transforming the future of medicine through novel forms of collaboration and patient-centered research. Co-led by Howard L. Weiner, MD, and Dennis J. Selkoe, MD, the center is founded on the belief that interdisciplinary collaboration, at BWH and beyond, will accelerate global innovation and discovery in neurologic diseases. Promising advances in neurologic diseases occur when research in one disease state is applied to other disease states, yielding breakthroughs that could not have occurred if the research remained in silos. By bringing together researchers and scientists working across each of the five diseases, the center aims to drive new ways of thinking that will create fertile ground for discovering life-saving cures.

**LEADERSHIP**

Howard L. Weiner, MD, is the Robert L. Kroc Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School, director and founder of the Partners Multiple Sclerosis Center, and co-director of the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. Dr. Weiner established the Partners Multiple Sclerosis Center at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in 2000, combining clinical evaluation, MRI imaging, and immune monitoring to form the first integrated MS center that brings these disciplines to the individual care of the MS patient. He has pioneered the use of immunotherapy and the drug cyclophosphamide for the treatment of multiple sclerosis and has investigated immune abnormalities in the disease, including the role of the innate immune system and regulatory T cells. He has also pioneered the use of the mucosal immune system for the treatment of autoimmune and other diseases. Based on his work, specialized vaccines are being tested in multiple sclerosis, diabetes, and most recently in Alzheimer’s disease. Dr. Weiner is the author of Curing MS: How Science is Solving the Mystery of Multiple Sclerosis, which chronicles the history of MS and his 30-plus years of experience in the research and clinical treatment of MS, and details his “21-point hypothesis” on the etiology and treatment of multiple sclerosis.

Dennis J. Selkoe, MD, is the Coates Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School and co-director of the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. After graduating from Columbia University with a BA and the University of Virginia with an MD, he trained at the National Institutes of Health, Harvard/Longwood Neurology, and the Harvard Medical School Department of Neuroscience. Dr. Selkoe and his colleagues isolated the tangles of Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and co-discovered their antigenic relationship to tau protein. His research on amyloid-beta protein and the amyloid-beta precursor protein (APP) gene led to the “amyloid hypothesis” of AD, which has helped provide the underpinning of numerous clinical trials, including the world’s first prevention trial in older individuals at risk for developing AD. His lab discovered that amyloid is produced by cells throughout life, enabling the dynamic study of amyloid generation and screens for inhibitors. Dr. Selkoe and his team showed that APP and presenilin mutations cause AD by altering amyloid production. With Michael Wolfe, PhD, Dr. Selkoe identified presenilin as the γ-secretase, the first intramembrane aspartyl protease in biology. Dr. Selkoe has received many honors for his work, including the Pioneer Award and Lifetime Achievement Award from the Alzheimer’s Association. He was the principal founding scientist of Athena Neurosciences, and is a founding director of Prothena Biosciences.
UNDERSTANDING FIVE NEUROLOGIC DISEASES

Brain Tumors
Brain tumors, in which cells in the brain accumulate and divide abnormally, represent one of the most lethal forms of cancer.

- Brain cancer can occur at any age, but frequency is higher in children and older adults
- Nearly 700,000 people are living with a brain tumor in the U.S. alone
- Survival rates have not changed significantly in the past 30 years

Multiple Sclerosis (MS)
Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks and destroys the myelin sheath surrounding nerve fibers in the brain and spinal cord. This results in symptoms such as loss of vision, loss of coordination and sensation, and difficulty walking. There is often a progressive accumulation of disability.

- The typical age of diagnosis is 20–50
- Women are 2 to 3 times more likely to develop MS
- 2.3 million people are affected worldwide
- There are 200 new diagnoses each week

ALS (Lou Gehrig’s Disease)
ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease) affects the motor neurons in the spinal cord, leading to paralysis of motor functions, including breathing. The cause is not known but appears to be related to the dysfunction of critical neuronal and supporting elements in the spinal cord. The immune system may also play a role.

- The typical age of diagnosis is 40–70
- 60% of people with ALS are men
- 400,000 people are affected worldwide
- Most often, ALS is fatal within 3–4 years of onset

Parkinson’s Disease
Parkinson’s disease involves the degeneration of nerve cells deep in the brain, leading to slowness of movement, tremors, and cognitive impairment. The cause appears to be related to the accumulation of alpha-synuclein, a neurotoxic protein that damages dopamine pathways in the brain.

- The typical age of diagnosis is 60+
- Men are 1.5 times more likely to develop Parkinson’s
- 7–10 million people are affected worldwide
- Current therapies reduce symptoms but do not delay the underlying disease processes

Alzheimer’s Disease
Alzheimer’s disease damages the nerve cells in the brain that are responsible for memory and cognition. Research conducted over the past two decades by Dr. Selkoe and his team have shown that buildup of amyloid proteins in the brain is largely responsible for the degenerative effects of the disease, but there is still much to be learned.

- The typical age of diagnosis is 60+
- Women are 2 to 3 times more likely to develop Alzheimer’s
- 46.8 million people are affected worldwide
- Up to 131.5 million people will be affected by 2050 without a major breakthrough

It’s very complex, logistically, to work on these diseases all at once. We have the intellectual and technical resources to do that.”
DENNIS J. SELKOE, MD
THE A4 STUDY: THE FIRST-EVER PREVENTIVE CLINICAL TRIAL FOR ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Reisa Sperling, MD, MMSc, director of the Center for Alzheimer Research and Treatment (CART) at BWH, is leading the groundbreaking Anti-Amyloid Treatment in Asymptomatic Alzheimer’s Disease (A4) Study, aimed at preventing memory loss due to Alzheimer’s. Using leading-edge brain scan technology to identify and track early amyloid buildup that can occur for decades before symptom onset, the study tests the use of solanezumab—an investigational anti-amyloid antibody—in patients who have no outward symptoms yet but show signs of amyloid accumulation in the brain. One thousand participants across more than 60 sites in the United States, Canada, and Australia will be monitored for three and a half years to track the earliest stages of memory loss, allowing researchers to determine whether solanezumab can help the brain clear the amyloid, thereby treating the disease before symptoms develop. This multicenter, collaborative effort will help deepen our understanding of how Alzheimer’s progresses and offer new hope for disease prevention.

FROM MS TO BRAIN TUMORS: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY DISCOVERY

Glioblastomas, one of the most deadly forms of brain tumor, are known to suppress the immune system, making them exceptionally difficult to treat. The immune system also plays a role in MS, and MS researchers in Dr. Weiner’s lab have identified a regulatory cell that plays an important role in down regulating the immune system. They found that these regulatory cells, which are present in abnormally high quantities around glioblastomas in animal models, can be identified by the expression of a peptide called LAP (Latency Associated Peptide) on the surface of the cells. LAP-positive regulatory cells have been shown to promote cancer malignancy and immune suppression in other types of cancer. With this in mind, researchers at the center have developed a highly specific antibody that targets LAP-positive regulatory cells and removes them from the body. When Dr. Weiner and his colleagues used this antibody to treat glioblastomas in animal models, the results were significant: immune response was restored, tumor growth arrested, and survival time increased. These promising results have led the team at the center to plan a clinical trial with this antibody.

A POTENTIAL NEW DRUG TARGET FOR ALS

Working toward potential treatment options for this devastating disease, Dr. Weiner and his team have identified a specific microRNA—a small RNA molecule that regulates gene expression—that is elevated in the blood and spinal fluid of patients with ALS and may play a key role in disease progression. Studies in the lab have shown this particular microRNA—MIR-155—can be blocked by administering an anti-MIR-155 compound, prolonging life in animal models and showing promising results by lowering levels in human cells. Dr. Weiner and his team, which includes collaborators at Massachusetts General Hospital, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center, are now working with a pharmaceutical company to develop a drug aimed at this unique and promising target.

A NOVEL HYPOTHESIS FOR PARKINSON’S DISEASE

For many years, researchers have been investigating the role of alpha-synuclein (αSyn) in Parkinson’s disease and its potential as a target for therapy. Working closely with Dr. Selkoe, Tim Bartels, PhD, and his colleagues have discovered that the typical structural form of αSyn is actually four αSyn proteins wound together, and that this structure resists disease-associated changes. Dr. Bartels hypothesizes that, in Parkinson’s, this normal four-part structure becomes more prone to disassembling into single units, which can then regroup into toxic assemblies that spread through the nervous system and initiate brain disease. The research team is now screening for drugs that stabilize the aggregated form of αSyn and prevent it from unfolding, as this could potentially prevent movement impairments and other symptoms experienced by Parkinson’s patients.

WORKING TOWARD A VACCINE FOR ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Drs. Weiner and Selkoe and their teams are currently investigating the development of a nasal spray aimed at clearing the brain of the amyloid proteins responsible for forming the characteristic plaques that impair memory and cognitive function in Alzheimer’s disease. Building upon a decade of research in which Dr. Weiner also called upon his expertise in MS to understand related biological processes and refine the vaccine, the team has honed in on a substance called Protollin that enhances the body’s immune response. This research is showing promising results in the lab. Dr. Weiner is now working with pharmaceutical companies in Canada and the Netherlands to manufacture a Protollin-based nasal vaccine and move it toward clinical trials.

AT THE FOREFRONT OF DISCOVERY: RESEARCH AT THE ANN ROMNEY CENTER FOR NEUROLOGIC DISEASES

We are pleased to share with you highlights of a broad array of activities across five disease areas by the more than 250 faculty and researchers affiliated with the center.
MOVING TOWARD A BLOOD TEST FOR PARKINSON’S DISEASE

In a paper published in the prominent journal, *Brain*, a multicenter study led by Clemens R. Scherzer, MD, pointed to the possibility of an effective biomarker for early Parkinson’s disease. The study, which looked at data from BWH patients as well as two large national study cohorts, found that reduced expression levels of the SNCA gene—related to the αSyn protein implicated in disease progression—are associated with Parkinson’s. This was true even for patients in the landmark Parkinson’s Progression Marker Initiative (PPMI), which enrolls patients very early on, before symptoms have met standard diagnosis criteria. SNCA levels can be obtained from a simple blood test, creating a pathway toward earlier, improved diagnosis, more effective clinical trials, and possibly one day a cure for Parkinson’s disease.

USING WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE PATIENT CARE

Wearable devices that measure an individual’s activity have become mainstream. This technology has the potential to collect robust data that could inform research and clinical care for specific diseases, including MS. In a groundbreaking new project led by Dr. Weiner and Tanuja Chitnis, MD, researchers in the center are partnering with Google Life Sciences to learn more about the biologic, physiological, environmental, and behavioral factors that influence a patient’s experience with MS as the disease progresses. The study, named SysteMS, will pilot wearable sensors developed by the life sciences team at Google that are designed to continuously measure movement, activity and vital signs. The study will build upon the renowned BWH CLIMB study, which contains a wealth of relevant data. This novel technology has the potential to inform clinicians and researchers about the day-to-day abilities and challenges of their patients, and offer insights toward new treatment targets and improved patient care.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF ADULT-DERIVED STEM CELLS

Tracy Young-Pearse, PhD, has made tremendous progress in the use of adult-derived stem cells, which can be easily obtained from adult human tissues, to study mechanisms of brain disorders. In collaboration with center researcher Matthew J. LaVoie, PhD, she and her team have established a novel cellular model of Alzheimer’s disease through which they can effectively study living human neurons cultured from Alzheimer’s patients. They are working to illuminate the mechanism by which the disease begins and, in collaboration with scientists at MIT, developing a new technique for examining cell responses to new drugs that affect amyloid generation. Dr. Young-Pearse aims to apply these methodologies to other neurological diseases, further illuminating the underlying mechanisms of these diseases and opening doors to novel therapies. Dr. LaVoie is also currently using similar techniques to generate new cell models of Parkinson’s disease.

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PARTNERS HEALTHCARE

WORLD MEDICAL INNOVATION FORUM

Hosted by Partners Healthcare in the heart of Boston, the World Medical Innovation Forum is a global gathering of more than 1,000 senior healthcare leaders from industry and academia centered on healthcare innovation. The inaugural forum took place in April 2015 and focused broadly on the neurosciences, featuring several of the center’s faculty as key participants and thought leaders. At this gathering, Ann Romney launched a social media campaign at BWH called 50 Million Faces and addressed the participants in a session moderated by Nancy Snyderman, MD, formerly the chief medical editor at NBC News.

BWH LAUNCH EVENT

ANN ROMNEY CENTER FOR NEUROLOGIC DISEASES

On the evening of October 14, 2014, more than 300 friends and supporters gathered to celebrate the public launch of the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases. Speakers included Drs. Nabel, Weiner, and Selkoe, Mrs. Romney, and several special guests who shared deeply personal stories about the challenges of living with neurologic diseases as well as the hope of a better future.
The Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases recognizes the benefit of bringing together voices from the broad community of patients and loved ones who are affected by neurologic diseases. Through our #50MillionFaces website, a social media campaign has emerged through which stakeholders are raising awareness, sharing stories, inspiring hope, and encouraging empowerment. More than 700 people have shared personal stories about their experiences with MS, Alzheimer’s disease, ALS, Parkinson’s disease, and brain tumors since the site launched in April 2015.

To join our community and share your story, please visit 50millionfaces.org.

#50MillionFaces

MONIQUE ALLEN BATISTE
I was diagnosed with MS in 2001. I was never afraid, only anxious. I wanted to know what would happen to my kids and how long I would live. I started seeing one of the most amazing neurologists in the world and started this beautiful journey. I have learned to appreciate the smallest things and my faith increased. I have the best support system in the world, and will continue to fight and pray for a cure for this devastating disease.

BRUCE BALLARD
I was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in 2012, although I started experiencing symptoms a few years before that. I still work at a job I love; it’s intellectually challenging and emotionally gratifying. I recently married the man I love, and we have a great life together. I still work out at the gym, write and publish, and play a musical instrument. Parkinson’s disease has thrown me obstacles (for example, I’m typing this with only one hand), but my life is fulfilling. For people newly diagnosed with Parkinson’s, please stay active. Life can still be good.

RYAN MOFFETT
It was so difficult watching the decline of my father’s health as Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s slowly took control of his body and mind. With each noticeable change, I was reminded of how much I loved that man. Then, two days following my father’s funeral, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. I was scared. As an artist, my first reaction was to express how I felt through my art. I soon discovered peace as I learned more about the disease and the wonderful research that is being done. I hold on to hope that my disease will not define who I am, and that someday, through my artwork and other efforts to raise awareness and funds for research, MS and other neurologic diseases will be cured.

PATRICK O’KEEFE
I am a 33 year old who has been able to fend off a primary brain tumor since being diagnosed in 2006. I have undergone three successful brain tumor resection surgeries, a few rounds of oral chemotherapy, and one round of proton therapy. I am one of the lucky ones who has had great care and a treatable form of this disease. I am married and am the father of a beautiful 8-month-old daughter. My wife and I are very grateful for the care I have received and still receive today, and we’re confident that we have a very long and healthy future ahead of us. However, not everyone has the ability to say this.

My biggest challenge is to manage my anxieties so that they don’t affect my job, my family, and my friendships. We need to get beyond just treatments and find a cure once and for all.

NICOLLE LEMAY RONDEAU
I was diagnosed with MS in 2003, and have experienced hospitalization, medications, and health challenges along the way. Unsure of what the future would hold, my husband, Chris, and I had a beautiful girl and boy, Belle and Beau. Most recently, my wonderful doctor at BWH has given me great news—my MS can be categorized as benign, and I can expect to remain relapse free for the long term. My first thought was to flee the building, never looking back at the doors of the MS Center. Then I heard about the work of Ann Romney. I was inspired to become that kind of patient—one who does not run away but who gets involved and fights for the cause. Thank you!

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HOWARD WEINER, MD
Here’s my mother and me in the Colorado Rockies just before we started doing more. I was never afraid, only anxious. I wanted to know what would happen to my kids and how long I would live. I started seeing one of the most amazing neurologists in the world and started this beautiful journey. I have learned to appreciate the smallest things and my faith increased. I have the best support system in the world, and will continue to fight and pray for a cure for this devastating disease.

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I felt devastated, panicked, dazed, and completely at a loss for words. We live a life of clichés right now. Our life changed in a minute. We live every day to the fullest. We don’t take anything for granted. Today, our spirits are high, our hope is renewed, and the promise of this center’s important work fuels us to battle on.

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To join our community and share your story, please visit 50millionfaces.org.
The core research laboratories of the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases will be located in a new state-of-the-art patient care and research facility, the Brigham Building for the Future. Scheduled to open in fall 2016, this LEED gold-certified building will be one of the most technologically sophisticated patient care and research facilities in the country that focus on the neurosciences, immunology, rheumatology, and orthopedics.

The newest Brigham and Women’s Hospital building will be a 383,250-square-foot facility, including three outpatient floors, one imaging floor, eight research floors, one administrative floor, and 400 underground parking spaces. It will also feature a centralized infusion suite and house a new conference center to facilitate research and clinical collaboration.

The first level will be dedicated to caring for patients and families affected by MS, Alzheimer’s disease, brain tumors, ALS, Parkinson’s disease, and other conditions that affect the brain and nervous system. It is designed to foster cooperation among clinicians from different specialties while caring for the needs of patients and their families. Teaming rooms will facilitate meetings between multidisciplinary care providers—a plan that fosters an integrated approach to patient care and leads to better outcomes.

The entire structure is designed to be flexible, with examination rooms and consultation rooms that adapt to patient flow. Each research floor in the BBF will measure 30,000 square feet and be home to approximately 30 principal investigators and 240 research staff. Access to natural light, views of the Riverway, and an open plan for collaboration will provide scientists with research spaces that foster creativity, productivity, and a robust exchange of ideas. The principal investigators have worked closely with architects to develop a layout that is efficient and allows for future growth.

In keeping with the center’s mission, the new building will enhance the pace of discovery and real-time engagement.

AT A GLANCE: THE BRIGHAM BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

383,250 square feet of program space
Three clinical floors for integrated outpatient visits
Eight floors of laboratory space to foster collaborative and translational science
One floor dedicated to advanced imaging capabilities, including some of the most powerful and precise technologies in the world
Conference space for investigators to meet and share discoveries
An infusion suite for patients with a wide range of diseases, from multiple sclerosis to rheumatoid arthritis
Green design, construction, and maintenance solutions to attain LEED gold certification and improve efficiency and sustainability
A cafe, rooftop garden, and terrace
More than 400 underground parking spaces
ANN ROMNEY CENTER FOR NEUROLOGIC DISEASES

ADVISORY BOARD

The advisory board helps the center’s leadership team advance key strategic priorities. Advisory board members provide guidance to raise awareness and visibility for the work underway, and position the center as a global leader in research and treatment for neurologic diseases.

- Ann Romney
- Gov. Mitt Romney
- Neil Cavuto
- John F. Fish
- Mary Margaret Flatley Darling
- Patricia Flatley
- Philip Friedmann
- Congressman Joseph Kennedy III
- Carrie Marriott
- Marc Mezvinsky
- Audrey McNiff
- Meredith Vieira (Honorary)
- Montel Williams
- Spencer Zwick

THE IMPACT OF PHILANTHROPY:
LOOKING AHEAD TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Thanks to dedicated leadership, inspired research, visionary participation, generous support, and courageous resilience on the part of so many, the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases is transforming the future of BWH’s neurological medicine.

In its first year, the center formalized a state-of-the-art home for several of the world’s foremost experts in neurologic diseases, nurtured up-and-coming researchers who will forge groundbreaking discoveries into the future, and fostered increased dialogue and awareness, leading to renewed hope for patients and their loved ones worldwide.

Through new forms of interdisciplinary and patient-centered research, we are accelerating innovation and discovery and yielding breakthroughs within the Boston-area medical community and beyond. By establishing deep collaborations within the center and nurturing strong relationships across institutions, the center is driving new ways of thinking, pioneering high-risk, high-reward investigations, and creating fertile ground for new advances and therapies.

We are deeply grateful to Mrs. Romney and to all of you—our visionary supporters—as we work together to achieve a brighter future for all people affected by neurologic diseases. We look forward to sharing challenges, discoveries, progress—and above all, hope—as we fight neurologic diseases together.

For more information about the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases, please visit our website at bwhannromneycenter.org.