



Science at the heart of medicine

## DR. ALAN LEGATT: BUILDING A LEGACY THROUGH TEAMWORK

Dr. Alan Legatt's first walk for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society in 2000 was cold and quite miserable. With three friends on his inaugural fundraising team, Dr. Legatt, Class of 1981, legged out six miles through suburban Rye in a freak spring blizzard. Eleven years later, his team – called The Hot Flashes – has raised more than \$310,000 for the MS Society. And Dr. Legatt, a professor of clinical neurology and director of Einstein's Clinical Neurophysiology Fellowship program, is gearing up for this year's walks, scheduled for Manhattan, Purchase, and Rockland County during the weekend of April 30 to May 1.



Dr. Legatt receiving the award for top fundraiser in 2006, presented by William O'Reilly, then president of the Southern New York Chapter of the National MS Society

MS is an autoimmune disease that attacks the myelin within the central nervous system. Myelin acts as a form of insulation around nerve cells and, when it deteriorates, nerve signals don't get through. In the disease's early stage, patients suffer attacks, but the body repairs the damage. As the disease progresses the body loses its ability to repair the myelin, and an individual's condition can worsen.

Research has shown great promise. For example, immune modulators, which patients inject, can help to dampen the autoimmune response to keep the disease at bay. However, no cure has yet been found. The Hot Flashes' fundraising helps fund the National MS Society's support programs and

medical research.

Last year, the 168-member team raised \$41,291, with Dr. Legatt himself bringing in almost \$11,000. "I hope to equal that total this year," he said. "Now that we have the date, it's time to move into high gear, sending team e-mails, cajoling people to register and fundraise and trying to inspire."

Dr. Legatt began raising money for the MS Society in 2000, in support of his Aunt Marlene, then wheelchair-bound due to the neurological disease. Two years later, a younger member of the family also was diagnosed with MS.

"That's when I turned into a fanatic," recalled Dr. Legatt, who also is director of the Intraoperative Neurophysiology Service at Montefiore.

Since then, raising money for MS has become a year round avocation, as he tirelessly seeks new team members and donors.

"I'm constantly recruiting," he said. "At the hospital, I ask anyone who seems appropriate."



The Hot Flashes

He is aided by a website, [www.teamhotflashes.org](http://www.teamhotflashes.org), and a database listing 727 former team members, along with 596 individuals he sees as potential members. He also offers incentives: the top three Hot Flashes fundraisers and their guests dine out with him and his wife, Dr. Elizabeth Legatt. This year, anyone who recruits 10 new team members will be invited as well.

The team name was adopted from a running group organized in 1999 by Dr. Harriett Kang, associate professor of neurology and pediatrics, which Dr. Legatt joined that year when he walked the New York Marathon. In turn, Dr. Kang has joined The Hot Flashes in their efforts to raise money for the MS Society, as have numerous colleagues from throughout the College of Medicine and Montefiore.



Approaching the finish

"What we do wouldn't be possible without the hard work of fundraisers like Dr. Legatt," said Christina McSwain, of the NYC-Southern NY chapter of the National MS Society.

In addition to championing the MS cause throughout the region, for 25 years Dr. Legatt's neurology practice at Montefiore has focused on "evoked potentials" — electrical signals that measure how the brain responds to a sensory stimulus. He often works alongside neurosurgeons and orthopedic surgeons during spinal surgery to

monitor the spinal cord during the procedure.

Once the surgery is underway, he stimulates nerves with electricity. The signals travel to the brain, where the evoked potentials can be measured. If the spinal cord becomes compromised, the signals don't get through.

"We do the test over and over during the surgery," he explained. "Since there's a small chance of spinal cord damage during the operation, it's like an early warning system for the surgeon and makes the operation safer."

While his focus on evoked potentials helps to signal possible danger to a patient during surgery, his ongoing efforts in behalf of the MS Society demonstrate a different type of evoked potential – the kind that taps into the positive energy of teamwork and helping others.

Visit [The Hot Flashes website](#) to see more photographs or to learn how you can take part in or support the team's effort.

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