

# Multiple sclerosis cure predicted

## Mendham Township researcher in forefront of battle against disease

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MENDHAM TWP. – A cure will be found within five to 10 years for multiple sclerosis (MS), a disease that debilitates more than 400,000 people a year in the U.S., according to Dr. Stuart Cook, a renowned researcher and past president of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of N.J. (UMDNJ); visit [www.nationalmssociety.org/njm](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/njm); or call Gina Murdoch at (732) 660-1005 ext. 16.

Cook, a township resident, spoke about his ground-breaking research and other aspects of the illness on the eve of a planned gala benefit to raise money for MS research. The “Musical Moments” benefit is set for tonight, Thursday, June 5, at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC). The headliner will be the legendary Smokey Robinson. Other performers at the event in past years have included Bette Midler, Kenny Loggins and Gladys Knight.

“Multiple sclerosis is a disease that can and will be conquered over the next five to 10 years,” said Cook who was UMDNJ president from 1998 to 2004. He is currently a faculty member, professor of neurology and neurosciences and director of the Multiple Sclerosis Treatment Center..

MS is a chronic, progressive illness that primarily effects men and women between 15 and 40. It affects the nerves in the brain, spinal cord, and other parts of the central nervous system. It is an autoimmune disease in which the body’s immune system targets itself, attacking cells, tissues and organs.

Various forms of MS affect more than 400,000 people in the United States and may affect 2.5 million people worldwide. Women get MS two to three times more than men, according to the MS Active Source website.

Cook said MS seems to be on the rise in North America, Canada, Denmark and Japan and particularly with women.

MS was first described in the 1860s by a French neurologist. Betaseron was the first medical treatment approved in 1993 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Cook said there are now six approved drugs and will likely be two to three more within three years.

Extensive medical histories have been kept since 1953 and the evidence shows the drugs

are helping “at least in the short term,” Cook said.

### **Progress Cited**

He said there’s been “tremendous progress” in recent years because of advances in molecular biology, genetics and the charting of the human genome, neuro-imaging techniques and development of huge data bases and collaborative studies around the world.

The increase in research also has been possible because of boosts in funds from federal agencies, private drug companies and non-profit groups like the national MS Society.

There are no drugs to prevent the onset of MS but there are therapies to relive acute attacks and hasten recovery after attacks. Cook also said drugs can prevent new lesions from forming and block progression of the disease.

“Over a period of years there tends to be gradual deterioration but many people have done extremely well,” Cook said.

The causes of MS are considered to be complex and may be hereditary and environmental . There is evidence that a shortage of Vitamin D or ultraviolet light deficiencies may predispose a person to MS, Cook said.

Part of the evidence comes from studies which show that 25 percent of those afflicted in the U.S. had Vitamin D deficiencies while the disease tends to be greater in colder climates with less sunlight.

Other environmental factors that may lead to MS are smoking and poor hygiene and water.

The current evidence is that MS is caused by a few or multiple viruses. Researchers have found that the virus that causes Epstein Barr can cause mononucleosis which may increase the risk of later developing MS.

Before being named president, he was chair of the Department of Neurosciences at UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School for 25 years. The department includes neuroscience researchers and clinicians with expertise in muscular dystrophy, chronic fatigue syndrome, spina bifida, epilepsy, and stroke therapy and prevention.

Over the past six years, Musical Moments has grossed more than \$6.5 million to support MS research at the Neurological Institute of New Jersey at UMDNJ. This year’s goal is to raise \$1.5 million.

General seating tickets are available for the concert through the box office at NJPAC. Prices range from \$20 - \$65.