

# Research News

DECEMBER 2006 - VOLUME 12

▶ CALL FOR ABSTRACTS .....2



▶ 17TH INTERNATIONAL ALS/MND SYMPOSIUM .....2



▶ SAN DIEGO CONSORTIUM FOR REGENERATIVE MEDICINE .....3



Welcome to Research News. This newsletter is sent to those who have signed up for ALS Society of Canada bulletins, the members of the ALS Society of Canada board of directors, provincial society staff, ALS researchers, ALS unit board members, ALS clinics, ALS society volunteers, and international ALS/MND organizations. If you wish others to receive this newsletter, please forward e-mail addresses to Bobbi Greenberg – [bg@als.ca](mailto:bg@als.ca) – requesting inclusion in the UPDATE e-list.

*In this newsletter we are bringing together and reporting on current research. ALS Canada does not assume responsibility for the information contained in this newsletter.*

**ALS Society of Canada**  
**265 Yorkland Boulevard, Suite 300**  
**Toronto, Ontario M2J 1S5**  
**Tel. 416-497-2267/ 1-800-267-4257**  
**Fax 416-497-1256 • [www.als.ca](http://www.als.ca)**



## MILITARY SERVICE AND ALS

A limited body of evidence suggests an association between military service and later development of ALS says a new report from the U.S. Institute of Medicine. Further research is needed to confirm this link given that only five studies have been conducted on the relationship between military service and ALS.

Three studies indicate that Gulf War veterans' chances of developing ALS – are as much as two times higher than those of the general population or of veterans who served during the same era but were not sent to the Persian Gulf during the 1990-1991 conflict. Another study reported that military service prior to the Gulf War is associated with a 1.5-

fold increased risk of developing the disorder. And, one found no link at all.

More high-quality studies on the relationship between military service and ALS are needed to provide additional evidence of an association, the report says. In addition, research should explore what might be causing ALS among veterans – whether it could be chemicals, involvement in traumatic events, intensive physical activity, or other substances or activities that might be encountered during military service.

The study was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. For more information [click here](#).

## CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Association (ALSA) is now accepting abstracts for multi-year grants, one-year starter grants awards and The Milton Safenowitz Post Doctoral Fellowship for ALS Research. For more information [click here](#).

## TRANSPLANTED IMMUNE CELLS PROLONG LIFE IN ALS

Researchers at the Methodist Neurological Institute have demonstrated that the immune cells of the spinal cord and brain contribute significantly to prolonging survival in a model of ALS, according to a study published in the October issue of *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences U.S.A.* By performing bone marrow transplants in mice that are born without immune systems, transplanted cells slowed the loss of motoneurons and increased life expectancy by 40 per cent. For more information [click here](#).



## 17TH INTERNATIONAL ALS/MND SYMPOSIUM

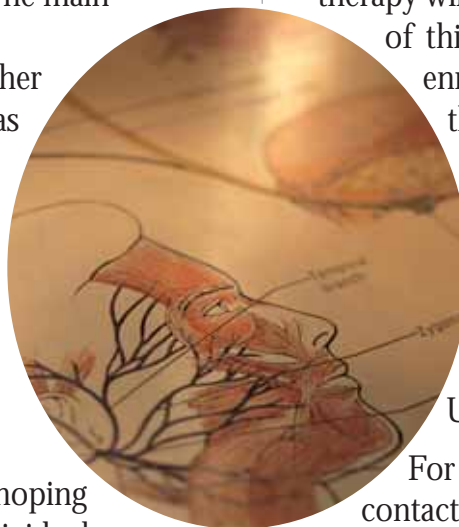
The symposium was held November 30 - December 2 in Yokohama, Japan. The abstracts from the symposium are posted on the International Alliance of ALS/MND

Associations web site. To read the abstracts [click here](#). The ALS Society of Canada is the host for the 18th annual symposium from December 1 - 3, 2007.

## NEW CLINICAL STUDY OPEN TO CANADIANS

The study focuses on implementing a new technique called electrical impedance myography (EIM), to serve as an indicator of ALS disease status. The main purpose is to determine whether EIM can serve as a new outcome measure in ALS clinical trials. The study will be taking place at eight institutions on the East Coast (U.S.) They are hoping to enrol 120 individuals from these centres and to follow their disease over a one-year period. Patients will be asked to return every other month for evaluations, and comparisons will

be made between EIM and more standard approaches for assessing ALS, such as muscle strength testing, questionnaires, and electrical nerve testing. No therapy will be provided as part of this trial, individuals enrolled in other therapeutic trials are still eligible to participate in this study. There was an article about EIM in the November issue of Research Update.



For more information contact Dr. Seward Rutkove, director of the division of neuromuscular disease in the department of neurology at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center at 617-667-3145 or e-mail at [eimstudy@bidmc.harvard.edu](mailto:eimstudy@bidmc.harvard.edu)

## STEM CELLS SUCCESSFULLY TREAT MD IN DOGS

Last month Muscular Dystrophy Association announced that Italian researchers have successfully used stem cells to treat dogs with a form of muscular dystrophy similar to Duchenne

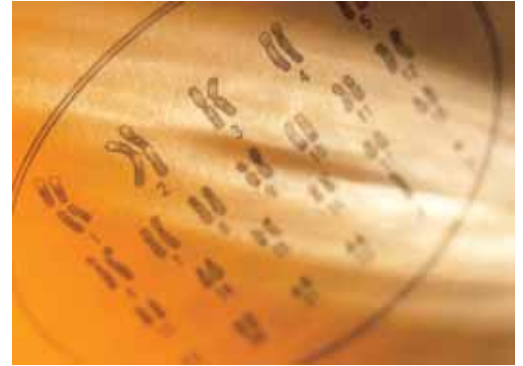
(DMD) type in humans. The investigators used a special kind of stem cell called a "mesoangioblasts" that can be isolated from muscle biopsies of living donors. For more information [click here](#).



## SAN DIEGO CONSORTIUM FOR REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

**F**our research institutions, based in San Diego, California, have announced their commitment to join forces in establishing an independent, non-profit consortium dedicated to stem cell research. The Burnham Institute for Medical Research, the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, The Scripps Research Institute and the University of California, San Diego signed an

agreement to pursue formal negotiations toward establishment and operation of an entity to be called the San Diego Consortium for Regenerative Medicine. The objectives of the consortium include establishing a jointly operated facility dedicated to stem cell research, and pursuing funding to support these collaborative projects. For more information [click here](#).



## FIRST INTERNATIONAL GENE SEARCH FOR TYPICAL ALS

**R**esearchers from the Laboratory of Neurogenetics, located at the National Institute on Aging in Bethesda, Maryland, have started the first broad search for genes that underlie ALS. This international study will analyze approximately 600 people with ALS from North America and Italy and 600 individuals who do not have ALS, using a new genetic method called Illumina SNP chips. The study will clarify the role of genes in causing ALS and results will be available next year. For more information contact Cynthia Crews, clinical research coordinator at [c crews@mail.nih.gov](mailto:c crews@mail.nih.gov) or 301-451-3826.

## MYOSTATIN INHIBITION SLOWS MUSCLE ATROPHY IN RODENT MODELS OF ALS

**T**his article was published in the September issue of *Neurobiology of Disease*. In this study, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine used transgenic mouse

and rat models of ALS to test whether treatment with anti-myostatin antibody slows muscle atrophy, motor neuron loss, or disease onset and progression. For more information [click here](#).

## NEW SCIENTIFIC DIRECTOR

**E**ffective January 1, 2007, Dr. Jane Aubin will head up the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's Institute of Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis. Dr. Aubin is professor of molecular and medical genetics in the faculty of medicine at the

University of Toronto, where she directs the bone program in the Centre for Modeling Human Disease. She is also the scientific director and CEO of the Canadian Arthritis Network Centres of Excellence. For more information [click here](#).

