



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MDA FUNDS UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA NEUROLOGIST EXPLORING LINK BETWEEN DIABETES AND FRIEDREICH'S ATAXIA

TUCSON, Ariz., Aug. 23, 2011 — The Muscular Dystrophy Association has awarded neurology professor David Lynch, M.D., Ph.D., at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, a \$202,222 grant to study the connection between diabetes and [Friedreich's Ataxia \(FA\)](#). Lynch has been an MDA-funded investigator for many years.

FA is a genetic disorder that damages peripheral nerves and the spinal cord affecting coordination and balance. It also can lead to cardiac abnormalities, foot problems, changes in vision and loss of leg reflexes. As the disease progresses, insulin resistance and diabetes develop in about 30 percent of individuals with FA.

The latest [Lynch award](#) is one of [40 new projects](#) representing a total new MDA grant investment exceeding \$13.7 million. Many of the peer-reviewed initiatives will run through July 2014.

MDA Vice President of Research Sanjay Bidichandani, M.B.B.S., Ph.D., said "It is likely that Dr. Lynch's research will not only help individuals with FA, but also could shed light on the causes of insulin resistance seen in individuals with the far more prevalent type 2 diabetes."

According to the National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, "adult-onset diabetes (type 2 diabetes) accounts for about 90 to 95 percent of all diagnosed cases of diabetes." A major cause of heart disease and stroke, and the leading cause of kidney failure, non-traumatic lower-limb amputations and new cases of blindness, diabetes affects more than 25.6 million adults in the United States.

"Insulin resistance has been implicated in many other diseases" underscored Bidichandani, adding that it is possible that results from the research being carried out by Lynch and colleagues could yield valuable insights into treating a number of disorders.

“We hope to identify the factors that predict the presence of diabetes in Friedreich’s ataxia, and thus determine who is most likely to get this complication,” Lynch said. “It may also allow earlier treatment of diabetes in FA and tell us the exact mechanisms by which it occurs.”

The team will work to identify specific genes that contribute to abnormal insulin resistance in FA. They also will focus on determining if frataxin, the protein that is deficient in FA, contributes to insulin resistance and diabetes.

About MDA

[MDA](#) is the nonprofit health agency dedicated to curing muscular dystrophy, ALS and related diseases by funding worldwide research. The Association also provides comprehensive health care and support services, advocacy and education. See MDA’s award-winning [“Make a Muscle, Make a Difference”® PSA](#).

In addition to funding more than 300 research projects worldwide, MDA maintains a national network of some 200 hospital-affiliated clinics; facilitates hundreds of support groups for families affected by neuromuscular diseases; and provides extraordinary local summer camp opportunities for thousands of children fighting progressive muscle diseases. The Association is the first nonprofit to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Medical Association “for significant and lasting contributions to the health and welfare of humanity.”

In the Philadelphia area, individuals living with neuromuscular diseases can receive excellent medical and health care services through the MDA clinics at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Individuals and families who are living with ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) are encouraged to visit the MDA/ALS Center of Hope at Drexel University College of Medicine in Philadelphia.

For more information about the Association and its programs, go to mda.org.