



Multiple Sclerosis Society  
Northern Ireland

# Foyle Branch ~ FOCUS ~

Member Support & Services



Winter 2004



## Chairperson's Christmas Message

Dear Members,

Can I take this opportunity on behalf of everyone in our branch to thank all the volunteers who helped us throughout the past year. The branch could not exist without you. The Committee and I would also like to wish all our members a Happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Peter Eakin



### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- Tuesday Club •  
*resumes 11th January 2005*
- Support Group Meeting •  
*Thursday 13th January 2005*
- Physio Exercise Class •  
*resumes Thursday 13th January 2005*
- Yoga •  
*resumes Tuesday 18th January 2005*
- Tai Chi •  
*resumes Thursday 20th January 2005*

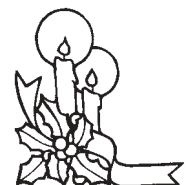
For further information  
telephone: (028) 7136 0831

### SELF ESTEEM

This four week course will commence on Monday 24th January 2005. Two hours per week, 2.00pm-4.00pm each Monday. The venue will depend upon the numbers wishing to attend but will be fully accessible. Please contact the Foyle branch Office to register or if you require further information.  
Tel: (028) 7136 0831

### CARERS SUPPORT NETWORK

*Would you like to be involved in establishing a Carer's Forum/Support Group within the Foyle Branch? A meeting will be organised in February 2005. Telephone the Branch Office to register your interest. We would appreciate your suggestions.*



## BRANCH SERVICES

The Foyle Branch of the MS Society delivers a range of services providing help and support to people living with and affected by MS, whilst funding research for hope in the future. Information and advice is available Monday to Friday from the Foyle Branch office, 58 Strand Road - Tel 7136 0831.

The MS Society Foyle Branch provide a range of services including: Physiotherapy exercise sessions, Yoga, Tai Chi/Qi Gong, Tuesday Club, Thursday Support Group, Accessible Transport, Library, Local and National Magazines.

**For information on any of our services please telephone the MS Society Foyle Branch office on 7136 0831, e-mail: [msfoyle@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:msfoyle@tiscali.co.uk) or visit our website at [www.msfoyle.freereserve.co.uk](http://www.msfoyle.freereserve.co.uk)**



### “The only way to find out’

*The death of the actor Christopher Reeve threw the already lively stem cell research debate into even sharper media focus. Alasdair Palmer is a columnist for The Sunday Telegraph.*

“The last time I wrote about multiple sclerosis I received a letter from a charming “old” lady (that’s how she described herself) which started: “Dear Mr Palmer, Why don’t you just die? There’s nothing anyone can do to help you. What you’ve got is incurable and it’s a complete waste of the NHS’s time and money to spend anything on trying to cure you. The doctors shouldn’t bother.”

“It was not the sort of letter to lift a man’s spirits, but my correspondent was right about one thing: MS belongs to the category of diseases - which includes Alzheimer’s,

## Who’s Who

Development Officer: Terry McNamee

**Tel: (028) 7136 0831**

Welfare: Moira Leitch

**Tel: (028) 7126 7400**

Chairperson: Peter Eakin

**Tel: (028) 7133 8641**

Vice-Chair: Michael Heverin

**Tel: (028) 7126 1118**

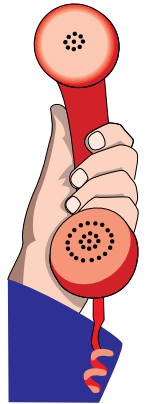
Secretary: Marie McGinn

**Tel: (028) 7186 0152**

Treasurer: Damien McKenna

**Tel: (028) 7136 3921**

**(MS Society Charity No: 207 495)**



Parkinson’s, Huntington’s disease, and a range of heart conditions - for which there is no cure. The best that can be hoped from the existing treatments is to slow the degeneration brought on by the progress of the illness.

“Research into therapies that use stem cells may have the potential to provide cures for a whole range of debilitating, crippling and frequently fatal ailments. Stem cells have the ability to develop into any of the 200 different kinds of cell that make up the human body. The existing studies suggest that it is possible for stem cells, if injected into a patient, to seek out and replace the damaged cells that are the cause of so many diseases: nerve cells in the case of multiple sclerosis, brain cells with Alzheimer’s, blood and heart vessels in the case of heart disease, and so on.

“Stem cells can be derived from adults: there are extractable stem cells among the cells that make up your skin and among those that make up your hair follicles, brain and bone marrow. The problem with adult-derived stem cells is that the repertoire of cell types that they can be persuaded to become is very restricted.

“This is not true of stem cells derived from two-day-old embryos. Those embryos are each made up of between four and eight completely undifferentiated cells which can develop into

any cell type. One source for such stem cells is the procedure of in vitro fertilisation. Only two of the 10 or so embryos created in a Petri dish during each episode of in vitro fertilisation will be implanted back in the woman who hopes to become a mother. The remaining eight are then frequently just thrown away.

One alternative to discarding them is to use them to create Stem cells. The process requires allowing the embryo to develop over a further five days into what is called a blastocyst, isolating the blastocyst's 20 or 50 stem cells, and then mixing them with a catalyst that will cause them to reproduce - which, if the conditions are right, they will do prodigiously."

Palmer talked to Dr Miodrag Stojkovic of the Life Centre at Newcastle University who explained that his laboratory had managed to obtain a billion stem cells from cells taken from a single blastocyst.

"The next stage," Palmer went on, "is to cause stem cells to develop into required kind of cell - nerve cells, blood cells, brain cells, liver cells, or whatever, according to the disease to be tackled. Those differentiated cells would then be injected into a patient to effect a "cell transplant". The hoped-for result would be replacement of damaged cells by ones which function properly, and so cure the illness."

He said it was not easy to understand why the use of blastocysts for stem-cell research was the source of controversy.

Dr Stojkovic told him, "Opponents of stem-cell research say that they would ban it because it involves the destruction of life. But what do they propose to do with the three-day embryos? Throw them away. There is no chance of in vitro fertilisation being made illegal, for the very good reason that in vitro fertilisation is a procedure that has created, over the past 25 years, thousands of healthy people who would otherwise not exist. As a society, we have accepted the creation of embryos in labs, and it is very tightly regulated in Britain. But it

is surely better that the cells from the embryos are not discarded, but used in a way which could help humanity."

"That consideration has started to have some persuasive effect," said Palmer. "Today, there are 50 or 60 research centres. Although the animal studies on the effectiveness of stem-cell therapies have been enormously promising, as have the few cases that have been attempted in human beings, it is still far too early to pronounce definitively on the viability of stem-cell therapy.

"Cell-replacement therapy using stem cells may turn out to be both safe and effective. On the other hand, it may turn out not to be. No one yet knows. The only way to find out is to do the research. Not to do it at all because of a dogmatic prior conviction that it cannot work is to take, towards me and the millions worldwide with currently incurable diseases, the attitude of that charming old lady."

## GOLDEN RAFFLE TICKETS

The Society's Great Golden Raffle was launched last year to a fantastic response from our membership and the general public. We raised £17,000 profit for the Society in Northern Ireland. This year we plan to do even better. Ten fantastic prizes include:

- |      |                                    |
|------|------------------------------------|
| 1st  | £1000 cash                         |
| 2nd  | Desktop personal computer          |
| 3rd  | 14" TV & DVD Player                |
| 4th  | 4 day return sailing to Scotland   |
| 5th  | Suite of patio furniture           |
| 6th  | Giant terraco bike                 |
| 7th  | CD Micro music centre              |
| 8th  | Outback Omega gas barbecue         |
| 9th  | Day trip for two to IKEA           |
| 10th | Meal for two, Stables, Groomspport |

For further information and to obtain tickets please contact Terry McNamee at The MS Society, NI, Foyle Branch Office, 58 Strand Road, Derry.

Tel: (028) 7136 0831

*P.S. We also need people to sell tickets.*



Pictured above left: Josephine Tinney (MS Ireland), Mervyn Brown MS Foyle with June Halper MS Specialist Nurse from USA at a recent conference held in Letterkenny and above right: Foyle Branch members pictured at a recent Information Morning held in Limavady



## MS Society Comment on MHRA Decision on Sativex

Commenting on the MHRA's decision not to grant a licence for the cannabis-derived medicine, Sativex, Mike O'Donovan, chief executive of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, said today (Friday 3 December 2004):

"This is extremely disappointing news for many of the 85,000 people in the UK who have MS.

"We believe there is now good evidence that cannabis-derived drugs can relieve spasticity in MS, as well as other distressing symptoms like pain and spasm. The difficulty is that measurements used by the regulators in assessing treatments for a variable and fluctuating condition like MS do not always detect significant benefits patients feel. These improvements to quality of life can make a big difference to people with MS, whose choice of treatments is very limited."

"The MHRA has said the quality and safety of Sativex are not in question. The Society believes those who might benefit should be able to have treatment prescribed on the NHS and we very much hope the Medicines Commission will take that view."



**ANNUAL CHRISTMAS DINNER 2004**