

THERE IS STRENGTH IN EVERY STORY.

FALL 2025

We are thrilled to share the 14th edition of the **endMS National Training Program's Spotlight on the Future** newsletter. In this issue you'll meet our newest graduating group of SPRINTers, their mentors and their lived experience community partners, you'll also find a welcome message from next year's Summer School hosts, and updates from our alumni community.

First, we extend our gratitude to the University of Alberta (UAlberta) and the UAlberta Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Centre, and to Dr. Jennifer McCombe and Dr. Jason Plemel for co-hosting this year's endMS Summer School. We are also grateful to our 2024-2025 SPRINT mentors, Dr. Raphael Schneider (BARLO MS Centre, Toronto), Dr. Julie Petrin (MS Canada), and Dr. Marc Horwitz (University of British Columbia) for generously sharing their time and expertise with the next generation of MS researchers.

This year's endMS Summer School took place from June 16 - 19th, 2025. Participants were treated to engaging presentations that deepened their understanding of novel MS research, and work related to, **"The Life Cycle of Innovations for Multiple Sclerosis: Drugs, Vaccines, and Biomarkers."**

The endMS Summer School brought together 40 graduate students, post-doctoral and clinical fellows, for four days of intensive learning. Participants attended sessions on a wide range of topics including: MS pathology, Epstein-Barr Virus, remyelination, pain and big-data approaches. Through focused workshops that showcased MS research and its translation, participants benefitted from a comprehensive program that included seminars about the life cycle of technology and its relation to MS.

Once again, we were honored by the participation of people living with MS (PwMS) who took part in the **"Lived Experience Panel"**. We are grateful to these community members for generously sharing their time and personal journeys with attendees. This year, the Summer School hosts invited PwMS to attend the full program. In total, 12 PwMS and three caregivers participated. Greatly valued by all, we will continue to provide similar events and content in future Summer Schools.

Over the past year, we have expanded our efforts to include PwMS directly in training and in networking with trainees. As part of this initiative, four PwMS joined as SPRINT Community Partners, collaborating with SPRINT teams from the outset of their projects. They provided valuable feedback throughout the process — up to and including the final lay summaries of the completed projects. Those summaries are available on our website.

We welcomed nine new SPRINTers to the program this year. (For the complete list of current SPRINTers, mentors and their profiles, please see page 5.)

On June 17th, our graduating SPRINTers presented their thought provoking and innovative interdisciplinary team projects:

- 1) **The Impact and Consequences of Redefining the Multiple Sclerosis Spectrum**
- 2) **Limited Care Options for Males Living with MS: A Call to Action**
- 3) **Epstein-Barr Virus and Multiple Sclerosis: Mechanisms, Therapeutic Implications, and Emerging Interventions**

From the feedback we received this year, trainees especially valued the talks with the Community Partners, and the many rich networking opportunities offered throughout this year's Summer School.

As always, Summer School was an enriching experience for all participants. This exceptional learning experience was made possible by the dedication, interest, and enthusiasm of everyone involved. The effort and commitment of all members of the training program — and the coordination and logistics required to keep all activities on track, contributed to the outstanding success of this year's Summer School.

We sincerely thank all the committee members, faculty, presenters, facilitators, panel members, organizers and all those affected with MS who generously shared their time and expertise in helping to ensure that the endMS National Training Program continues to inspire and engage new generations of MS researchers.

As always, we are excited about the future of research, and we are looking forward to learning and working together to grow our community of trainee researchers. With this goal in mind, the upcoming 2026 endMS Summer School, will be held at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

Additional information about the application process will be shared in December. To read a message from next year's Summer School hosts, (please see page 13).

sprint

(Scholar Program for Researchers IN Training)

THE SPRINTers,
MENTORS AND
COMMUNITY
PARTNERS

OUR SPRINTers:

Aysika Das
Kevin Champagne-Jorgensen
Reda Fazazi
Tamanna Islam
Jake Neufeld
Tatiana MacKeigan
Bozena Szulc
Lies Van Horebeek
Paul Yejong Yoo

OUR MENTORS:

Dr. Julie Petrin
Dr. Marc Horwitz
Dr. Raphael Schneider

OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

Jessica Kirbyson
Karen Tweed
Barbara Van Wallegheem

It is with great pride that we wish both our new and graduating SPRINTers continued success in their future endeavors. (To learn more about some of our SPRINT alumni, please turn to page 19.)

In closing, we wish our current SPRINTers and mentors a year filled with rewarding collaborations, enlightening research, and prolific discoveries. We look forward to seeing you in June, 2026!

DR. CHRISTINA WOLFSON
DIRECTOR,
NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

ANIK SCHOENFELDT
MANAGER,
NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

SPRINTERS 2024-2025 MENTORS COMMUNITY PARTNERS



AYSIKA DAS

SPRINTER

Aysika Das was born in Kolkata, West Bengal, India, and earned a BTech in genetic engineering from the Sri Ramaswamy Memorial Institute of Science and Technology in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. She now lives in St. John's, Newfoundland, where she is a PhD candidate in the lab of Dr. Deepak Kaushik, at the Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN).

Aysika is fascinated by how heterogeneous MS is, and how no two people are affected in the same way. The life-altering nature of MS, and the fact that it often affects young adults, are also sources of interest for her.

Currently, Aysika is focusing on microglia metabolism in MS, using the experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAE) mouse model. "My project investigates how microglia modulate its metabolic state in MS, particularly focusing on EMMPRIN (Extracellular matrix metalloproteinase inducer)," she explains.

Given the lack of understanding about how immune cells in the brain and periphery contribute to both damage and repair during MS, Aysika says she wants her research "to help close that gap". Elaborating upon the dual nature of the immune cells in the brain, she says, "If we can tip this balance toward repair, we could change the course of MS."

Although she says she wanted to become an astronaut when she was young, Aysika also developed an interest in knowing "how genes and genetics work" during her childhood. She reveals that this fascination drove her toward research, and ultimately inspired her to pursue her undergraduate degree in genetics.

When asked about the mentors who have inspired her, Aysika says her supervisor, Dr. Kaushik, (MUN) has been instrumental in shaping her scientific thinking, he encourages her to ask deeper questions, and supports her in pursuing innovative approaches in MS research.

Aysika admits that translating the findings from mice to humans is often difficult. Despite this challenge, she says, "Everyday there is something new and exciting things to learn!"

Although Aysika says "a complete cure" for MS may take time, considering

the heterogeneity among patients, she believes "major breakthroughs in MS-modifying therapies and repair strategies are achievable within our lifetime."

“Every advancement in understanding MS, no matter how small, brings us one step closer to meaningful treatments. I am grateful to be part of a research community committed to making that future a reality.”

Through her participation in Summer School and SPRINT, Aysika had the opportunity to meet and talk with individuals who are currently living with MS. This, she admits, "truly opened her eyes" to the daily struggles they endure. "Hearing their stories made me deeply aware of the constant pain and challenges they face in everyday life," she recalls.

For Aysika, the most inspiring aspect of SPRINT involved learning how basic science and rehabilitation could be directly linked to patient outcomes. "Another thing that inspired me was that people living with MS were very much interested in our scientific research," and "in the hope that it will finally lead to a cure someday soon," she adds.

SPRINT also gave Aysika a broader understanding of MS pathology, beyond her niche focus. "Every advancement in understanding MS, no matter how small, brings us one step closer to meaningful treatments. I am grateful to be part of a research community committed to making that future a reality," she says.

With regard to her future career goals, Aysika Das remains open. For now, she is considering either, leading a lab as an independent MS researcher, or joining a pharmaceutical company that focuses on neuroimmune interactions and therapies for MS patients.

When not conducting research, Aysika enjoys going for long walks while listening to music, hanging out with friends, and trying different cuisines. She also enjoys singing traditional Indian folk songs.

2024-2025 endMS Education and Training Committee

Dr. Christina Wolfson (CHAIR)
DIRECTOR, endMS NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Dr. Marcia Finlayson
CO-DIRECTOR, endMS NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Dr. Nathalie Arbour
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Dr. Nader Ghazemlou
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SPRINT ALUMNI TRAINEE REPRESENTATIVE, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

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Dr. George S. Robertson
DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Dr. Lisa Walker
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

Anik Schoenfeldt
PROGRAM MANAGER, endMS NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

Dr. Jennifer McCombe
2025 endMS SUMMER SCHOOL CO-HOST, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Dr. Jason Plemel
2025 endMS SUMMER SCHOOL CO-HOST, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA



KEVIN CHAMPAGNE-JORGENSEN

SPRINTER

Originally from Selkirk, Manitoba, Dr. Kevin Champagne-Jorgensen, now lives in Toronto, Ontario, where he is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Toronto.

Kevin received his BSc (Honours) from the University of Winnipeg, before earning his PhD from McMaster University. He then completed a postdoctoral fellowship at San Diego State University.

Kevin has chosen to focus on MS since it lies at the intersection of neuro-immunity and microbial influences — two areas he finds compelling. He adds that he is intrigued by emerging evidence that the gut microbiome and viruses like Epstein-Barr may shape its progression.

The life-changing challenges that arose following the MS diagnosis of a 20-year-old acquaintance of Kevin's, made a lasting impression on him.

Consequently, he admits to having become increasingly invested in understanding MS, and in "contributing to research that may one day improve the lives of those affected by it."

Furthermore, "Since joining the MS research community, I've had the privilege of meeting and hearing from people living with MS, which has deepened my understanding of their experiences and strengthened my commitment to this work," Kevin says.

When discussing the various mentors who have inspired Kevin on his academic journey thus far, he reveals, "My PhD advisor, the late Dr. John Bienenstock (McMaster University), nurtured my fascination with mucosal immunology and the profound influence that microorganisms can have on our health and wellbeing. His mentorship sparked a lifelong curiosity about the immune system's interactions with our microbial environment." Similarly, Kevin's current post-doctoral supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Gommerman (University of Toronto) has been equally inspiring in "modeling what it means to be both a rigorous scientist and a compassionate mentor. I've been fortunate to learn from mentors who exemplify the kind of researcher I hope to become."

Over the years, Kevin has changed his field of study. His undergraduate research was in organic chemistry,

he then began exploring cognitive psychology and Alzheimer's research. Later, he worked in molecular biology and neurodevelopment before pursuing a PhD with a focus on how antibiotics and gut microbes influence brain development and functioning. In his first postdoctoral fellowship, Kevin studied bacteriophage therapy for multidrug-resistant bacterial infections. Now, he is investigating how aging and the microbiome contribute to MS progression, while also studying mucosal immunity during viral infections. "Although I've explored many scientific disciplines, MS research brings together so many of my interests that I finally feel I've found the right focus for the long term," he reveals.

Outside of research, Kevin's first job was as a cook at a pizzeria. Although interested in science and engineering at that time, he admits to having been clueless that being "a scientist" was a "real" job. "While my first kitchen job didn't teach me much about science,

I learned a lot about persistence and how to stay focused and calm in high-pressure environments," he recalls.

When discussing his participation in SPRINT and the endMS Summer School, Kevin says both were influential in broadening his knowledge of MS, and each enabled him to form connections with his current colleagues, and with those he hopes to work with in the future. "It's been a really wonderful introduction to MS Canada and I'm very grateful for the connections I've made as a result."

Although he admits that it is difficult to find time outside of research, Kevin tries to stay active by cycling and running. "I also enjoy gardening, woodworking/building stuff, reading, and spending time with my family (and my cats)," he says.

Kevin's long-term career goal is to be a research professor and lead his own research group to study the MS, neuroimmunology, and the micro-biome-gut-brain axis.

“Since joining the MS research community, I've had the privilege of meeting and hearing from people living with MS, which has deepened my understanding of their experiences and strengthened my commitment to this work.”



REDA FAZAZI

SPRINTer

Reda Fazazi was born in Casablanca, Morocco and currently lives in Quebec City, Canada. He earned his BSc in biomedical science and his MSc in molecular medicine from the Université Laval, where he is now pursuing his PhD in molecular medicine.

Prior to embarking on the study of MS, Reda's first job was as a soccer referee. Although he began when he was just 14 years old, Reda is still refereeing — only now he is doing so at the professional level, in the Canadian Premier League.

When not conducting research, most of Reda's spare time is spent focusing on soccer. "It takes time for fitness training, education and travelling for games all across Canada," he explains. According to Reda, this job has taught him to be disciplined, patient and humble — qualities he believes are necessary for academic research.

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SPRINT gave me more knowledge on MS, developed my network, and gave me extra motivation to keep doing research on MS.

When asked about the mentors who have encouraged him, Reda admits to being inspired by the “never-ending enthusiasm” of his PhD supervisor, Dr. Manu Rangachari (Université Laval).

In so far as the challenges he has faced within his field of study, Reda explains that limited funding can prove challenging given how expensive some experiments are. Consequently, he believes that creativity and resourcefulness are essential in establishing new methods toward achieving his goals.

Reda decided to join SPRINT not only as a means of learning more about MS, but also to force himself out of his comfort zone, both “scientifically and humanely.”

“SPRINT gave me more knowledge on MS, developed my network, and gave me extra motivation to keep doing research on MS,” he reveals. With ample opportunities for collaboration,

Reda says his participation taught him how to rely on others for their strengths, and vice versa.

Reda explains that a large portion of the work done during SPRINT was related to clinical outcomes in MS. Having come from a basic science background in immunology, he says he gained “a lot of knowledge in this area” as a result.

Reda also mentions that his SPRINT mentor, Dr. Marc Horwitz, “was really great, he spent a lot of time helping us, and guiding us.” Consequently, this has inspired Reda to want to become a Principal Investigator working on MS, (basic science – immunology).

When asked if he thinks a cure for MS is forthcoming, Reda is optimistic. He replies that future therapies will target compartmentalized inflammation and promote remyelination, which ultimately will help lessen the burden of MS symptoms.

Reda adds that he wishes to thank “MS Canada and the SPRINT program organizers for the opportunity to participate in this wonderful experience... the collaboration in the MS research field is astonishing, and the support from MS Canada is great!”

2025-2026 endMS SPRINTers

Hannah Bernstein
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Gabriela Blaszczyk
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Molly Pitkethly
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mahir Rahman
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Landon Scholly
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Dr. Lauren Strasser
THE HOSPITAL FOR SICK CHILDREN

Doriana Taccardi
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Thomas Worthington
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Jennifer Zagrodnik
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

2025-2026 endMS SPRINT Mentors

Dr. Deepak Kaushik
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

Dr. Ruth Ann Marrie
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Dr. Robert Simpson
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



MARC HORWITZ

Mentor

Dr. **Marc Horwitz** earned his BSc, and MSc from the University of California, Davis, USA before completing his PhD at the University of Minnesota. His postdoctoral research training continued at The Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California. Originally from Los Angeles, California, he currently lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, where he is a professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology and Sauder Chair of Pediatric Virology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Marc is the Leader of the Autoimmune Biomedical Collaborative Research Cluster working under the VP Research, at the Auto-immune Disease Research Group at the Life Sciences Institute, and Director of the Experimental Modeling Facility at UBC.

Dr. Horwitz is currently seeking to understand the mechanism of virus

etiology of MS. Specifically focusing on Epstein-Barr virus, he is also working on identifying and dissecting the roles of other factors in the initiation and progression of MS. “Now, we are using this knowledge to develop treatments and preventative strategies,” he explains.

When discussing why he has chosen to focus on MS, Dr. Horwitz reveals his passion for his field. “I like complicated, I like the novelty,” he admits. “Over my career, my focus has been on the mechanistic role for viruses... and the virus etiology of MS has been interesting, intriguing and important. This understanding could benefit patients and/or prevent MS.” Marc adds that he finds it exciting to have the ability to make a difference that could benefit patients and prevent MS.

Marc shares that Type 2 Diabetes runs in his family, so he's empathetic toward those living with MS, and feels compelled to help them. “I've come to know many people who have MS and my heart does go out to them,” he says.

When asked if he believes a cure for MS will be found in his lifetime, he provides a unique response. “We need an affordable cure with less risk that is accessible to everyone that needs it.

We need prevention.” He reiterates that his long-term career goal is to “develop a treatment or preventative therapy.”

Prior to embarking on a career in research, Marc held two jobs, one as a veterinary assistant at a pet hospital and the other as an orderly in a hospital. “My Dad was a physician, and I've always wanted to help people and animals. I realized that I could use my scientific curiosity and investigative strengths to develop a greater understanding with the potential to develop treatments to affect more people.”

In so far as helping others through his role as a SPRINT mentor, Dr. Horwitz says, “I enjoy working with trainees, 1:1 and in small teams, it's a joy! Our team had three trainees and a person with lived experience. I was inspired by them. Their ability to work as a team was inspiring. Their curiosity, motivation and energy combined with their diverse points of view was outstanding,” he recalls.

Through SPRINT, Marc says he was able to hone his skills, “specifically leadership, patience and listening. I've always run my research group with a similar style, treat everyone like an adult, listen to them and work together to go forward. Mistakes are important

to the process. For my team, they are stuck with me and my ways. Here, it was a new group and the process paid off and they were successful,” he says, adding that SPRINT is now “part of my journey and the group is now part of my career network/family, so we will continue to grow together.”

Outside of work, Dr. Horwitz unwinds by going for long walks with his wife. He also cares for his animal family, which consists of three cats, a dog and a chicken.

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TAMANNA ISLAM

SPRINTer

Tamanna **Islam** currently lives in Ottawa, Ontario, where she is pursuing her PhD in experimental psychology at the University of Ottawa with Dr. Lisa Walker. Originally from Bangladesh, Tamanna received her BSc and MSc in psychology from the University of Dhaka, in Bangladesh.

Presently, Tamanna is working on two studies for her doctoral research, and is also involved in a collaborative project with Dr. Pilutti's lab (University of Ottawa) and Dr. Tremblay's lab (University du Québec en Outaouais). She explains that together, these studies aim to address cognitive fatigability (CF) in MS.

When asked why she has chosen this field of study, Tamanna reveals that her sister lives with a rare condition, called Endophthalmitis. “Growing up, I witnessed my sister's struggle to adapt to her sudden vision loss, which eventually led to various mental health issues.”

Tamanna's interest in helping others overcome similar health challenges grew even stronger after she began working as a mental health professional with Humanity and Inclusion Bangladesh, in support of Rohingya refugees.

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SPRINT has helped me develop a researcher's perspective where I feel comfortable collaborating with other researchers and exchanging knowledge effectively.

“Working directly with refugees was an emotional experience for me; I found it difficult to cope with witnessing their suffering firsthand. I realized I wanted to contribute in a way that could help others through research, without having to endure the emotional toll of being on the frontlines. I felt unprepared and limited in what I could offer in emergency settings, which motivated me to gain expertise in research. My goal became to develop tools and interventions that address needs when immediate resources are scarce,” she explains.

Wanting to focus on cognitive rehabilitation delivered in group settings, Tamanna says this approach can be both cost-effective and provide social support by connecting people facing similar challenges. She is now learning how to conceptualize and implement a behavioral intervention for people living with MS, designed to be delivered in a group format. “This work feels aligned with my passion for helping others in a sustainable and impactful way,” she says.

When asked if any mentors have encouraged her on her study path, Tamanna mentions her PhD supervisor

Dr. Lisa Walker (Ottawa Hospital/ Ottawa Hospital Research Institute). Given how challenging the PhD journey can be, “especially for international students navigating new systems and cultural expectations,” Tamanna says it is thanks to Dr. Walker that she has grown both personally and professionally throughout this experience.

When reflecting upon her participation in the endMS Summer School, Tamanna recalls some powerful moments from the lived experience panel, which featured people living with MS and their care partners. “Their stories helped me understand the ongoing challenges people with MS face and taught me that meaningful research must go beyond symptom management to address broader aspects of quality of life. This experience deeply inspired me and laid the foundation for my current research,” she says.

Tamanna reveals that her participation in SPRINT has reinforced her dedication to patient-centered, multidisciplinary approaches. She says it has also motivated her to contribute to research that will advance scientific knowledge and lead to meaningful, real-world outcomes that will help the MS community live fulfilling lives.



“Most importantly,” she adds, “SPRINT has helped me develop a researcher's perspective where I feel comfortable collaborating with other researchers and exchanging knowledge effectively.”

When not doing her research, Tamanna loves to travel and paint. “I also enjoy reading books, listening to podcasts, watching TV, and learning new skills. These activities help me relax, recharge, and maintain a healthy balance with my academic work,” she admits.

Tamanna's long-term career goal is to become a well-rounded MS researcher, deepen her knowledge of rehabilitation approaches for MS, and establish her own lab where she can advance the field of cognitive rehabilitation in MS.



JESSICA KIRBYSON

Community Partner

Originally from The Pas, Manitoba, **Jessica Kirbyson** now lives in St. Andrews, Manitoba. She earned her Bachelor of Nursing Degree in a joint baccalaureate nursing program from the University of Manitoba and the University College of the North.

It was at the very beginning of her nursing career that Jessica was diagnosed with MS. This was during the Covid-19 pandemic, in October 2021.

With her background in nursing, Jessica says she knew what MS was clinically, but admits, “Nothing can prepare you for hearing those words yourself when you're in your mid-20's.” She says her life suddenly “felt like it was split in two” — with a distinct “before” the diagnosis, followed by an initially overwhelming “after”.

In retrospect, Jessica now believes her diagnosis was a turning point, “and kind of amazing” given how it helped shape

how she interacts with, and perceives, her patients and community.

Describing herself as “a person who wants to make things better for other people,” Jessica says her passion lies in “fulfilling acts of service”. This passion became even more evident after she moved from The Pas to St. Andrews, Manitoba. There, she discovered how logistically difficult and costly it was to seek medical support for MS, given the area's limited services. Consequently, she took it upon herself to initiate change, with a goal of “making a difference in the North, for people who had to leave their homes to see specialists.”

After doing some research online, Jessica decided to “reach out to an MS research group”. Although she felt somewhat vulnerable at the time, she bravely sent out an email explaining that despite her relative youth, she was very passionate about making a difference, and was eager to be of service to the MS community.

It was that very letter which eventually led to her involvement with the MS community, and ultimately, to her participation in the endMS Summer School's Lived Experience Panel. Jessica reveals that her experience with the program was deeply fulfilling, and not only helped turn her diagnosis

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Many SPRINTers “are doing research because they have a personal connection or history with MS... that's the part many people don't get about health care - it's not just about data and protocols, it's about real soul connections... MS is a huge Mount Everest and everyone needs help to summit Mount Everest.

into something constructive, but was also a way to both give back, and influence the future of MS research. She is hopeful that her participation in SPRINT will have a “ripple effect” that will in turn help how future studies are done, and how care is delivered.

When asked which aspect of MS require more research, without hesitation, Jessica replies, “pain.” As a practicing nurse with MS, Jessica is familiar with both sides of the coin – as both patient and medical professional. Similarly, she says many SPRINTers “are doing research because they have a personal connection or history with MS... that's the part many people don't get about health care – it's not just about data and protocols, it's about real soul connections... MS is a huge Mount Everest and everyone needs help to summit Mount Everest,” she says.

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Before the first Summer School I was struggling to plan what would come after my master's, but after that one week I had such a clear vision for what I want for myself and how I see myself fitting into the MS community in the long term.

In addition to her father, Tatiana also mentions having been inspired by her undergraduate thesis supervisor Dr. Peter Stys (University of Calgary) for his “almost contrarian way” of approaching research, “unapologetically questioning this very immune-centric field and holding us all to the highest standard. I honestly don't think I would have fallen in love with research and decided to pursue graduate studies

if not for the exceptionally positive experience I had in his lab and the guidance I received while making career decisions,” she admits. Tatiana also acknowledges the valuable support she received from Megan Morgan, a research technician who mentored her in Peter Stys' lab. “I find myself modelling my own practices after hers and aspiring to her standard of excellence every day,” she says.

For Tatiana, participating in SPRINT helped her gain perspective on her future career aspirations. “Before the first Summer School I was struggling to plan what would come after my master's, but after that one week I had such a clear vision for what I want for myself and how I see myself fitting into the MS community in the long term.”

Tatiana now aspires to be a clinician investigator who focuses on translational research in neurodegeneration and progressive MS.

When not pursuing her career goals, Tatiana enjoys running, paddle boarding, scrapbooking, “drinking bubble tea with friends” and watching anime and hockey.



TATIANA MACKEIGAN

SPRINTer

Tatiana **MacKeigan** earned her BSc in neuroscience (Honours, First Class), from the University of Calgary, in Alberta. Originally from Airdrie, Alberta, Tatiana now resides in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she just completed her MSc in neuroscience at the University of British Columbia.

The aspects of MS that Tatiana is focused on include genetics, demyelination, and neurodegeneration. Her master's project is titled, “Investigating susceptibility to demyelination in an Ermin deficiency-based model of multiple sclerosis.” Tatiana explains that she was “looking at the role of this oligodendrocyte specific protein in myelin integrity using the cuprizone mouse model.” She is now a research



JAKE NEUFELD

SPRINTER

Born in Saskatoon, SK, **Jake Neufeld** earned his BSc in kinesiology, and is currently working on his MSc in health sciences at the College of Medicine, at the University of Saskatchewan.

Jake's thesis project involves the exploration of the use of a wearable device, capable of measuring and providing auditory, walking quality feedback. Jake has been testing this device on people with MS who have walking impairments. "My research is focused on improving quality of life and neuroplastic changes as a result of exercise and rehabilitation," he explains.

Jake has chosen to study MS due to his fascination with the central nervous system "and the immense role it plays in affecting our entire body." Additionally, Jake is from Saskatchewan where MS is prevalent. "I know many

people who are impacted by MS, and I find it intriguing/frustrating that there is still so much that we do not know about it," he says.

On a more positive note, Jake says, "I believe there is so much fascinating work being done in neuro rehabilitation and that there are many ways we can improve the efficacy of rehabilitation and health outcomes for people with MS."

Jake says he has gotten to know many people who have volunteered their time to participate in his clinical research.

"I believe there is so much fascinating work being done in neuro rehabilitation and that there are many ways we can improve the efficacy of rehabilitation and health outcomes for people with MS."

He expresses gratitude about working together with them, "to improve the lives of people living with MS."

When discussing the mentors who have inspired him during his studies, Jake admits that he would "love to give a huge thank you to my supervisor Dr. Sarah Donkers (University of Saskatchewan). Prior to starting my master's, I had very little knowledge of MS. Sarah has inspired me with her work, and I am so grateful to be part of her team."

After joining SPRINT to connect with other MS researchers across the country, Jake says he was introduced to many other types of research within the field of MS. Consequently, he says that now he would now "love to be able to work more with MS biomarkers and other avenues of clinical research." To this he adds, "I believe that the program has given me many connections across the country. Regardless of where I end up, I have created friendships and partnerships that I feel will continue for many years to come."

Aside from being able to work with "people from multiple fields" on his SPRINT project, Jake says he was better able to "grasp the big picture" of his research.

"I feel that SPRINT has helped me to be able to draw connections between the research that we were doing in SPRINT and the research in my own research lab."

Jake believes that a cure for MS will be discovered in his lifetime. "I believe that even in the last few years there has been some groundbreaking work in MS research and that hopefully with the advancement in machine learning, and talented scientists, we will be able to find a cure."

Before embarking on his studies in science, Jake's first job was as a life-guard. "I initially thought that I would be an entrepreneur. I think that this passion for exploring new things and the creativity involved in finding answers to problems, is important as a researcher. I hope to continue to use these skills of life saving and creativity in the future as a medical doctor," he says.

Having recently started medical school, Jake hopes to continue to be involved in the study of neurological conditions, and clinical research in the future.

Outside of his studies, Jake enjoys spending time outdoors, traveling, and training for track and field.



JULIE PÉTRIN

Mentor

Originally from Kazabazua, Quebec, **Dr. Julie Pétrin** now lives in Ottawa, Ontario, where she is Director, Impact and Evaluation at MS Canada.

Julie's academic path began at Bishop's University, where she earned a BSc in neuroscience. From there, she went on to Queen's University, where she obtained an MSc in anatomical sciences, and a PhD in rehabilitation science. She later completed her postdoctoral fellowship in implementation science, at the University of Saskatchewan.

In her current role at MS Canada, Julie taps into her research and analytical skills to track MS Canada's progress on delivering impact goals that improve the wellbeing of those affected by MS.

Julie's interest in MS research began at the age of 17, not long after she'd completed high school. After losing sensation in her right leg, (which eventually led to drop foot and impaired walking) Julie developed numbness in her face and right arm which left her unable to hold a pencil, "which I needed during exams!" she recalls.

Over the span of many months, she made multiple trips to the ER, and after "many out-of-pocket payments" Julie was eventually diagnosed with MS.

"This diagnosis flipped a switch in me. I needed to understand what was happening inside my body." Consequently, Julie added some courses on the human brain and then continued down that path. Through her experiences, she realized there was a "profound need for healthcare" which compelled her to apply to medical school.

When she wasn't admitted, Julie pursued a degree in anatomical sciences. "Working with my community, completing qualitative work was extremely rewarding," she explains. "It was a way to have an impact without medical school and the potential deleterious impact on my health," Julie adds.

During this time, Julie met her mentor, Dr. Marcia Finlayson at Queen's University. Marcia pushed Julie's critical and analytical skills, and her other mentor, Dr. Sarah Donkers at the University of Saskatchewan, introduced her to the field of implementation sciences.

When asked if she believes a cure for MS will be found in her lifetime, Julie says we are close however she isn't convinced "that it will be one cure." Since her own diagnoses, Julie says the number of MS treatments has jumped from 4 to 19, and "disability has been drastically delayed and mortality significantly reduced. As a scientist,

"My experience as a SPRINTER was a main driver in wanting to give back to the program and become a Mentor. It feels like a real full circle moment, which helps me reflect on how far I have come and how supported I have felt along my journey with the support from the MS research community and the endMS National Training Program."

MS is extremely interesting and there are still many avenues to explore and so much work to be done..."

For Julie, SPRINT was an opportunity to grow, learn new skills and build networks. Invigorated and inspired by the SPRINTers and Summer School attendees, she is also inspired by the researchers who give their time to support the program for free.

"My experience as a SPRINTER was a main driver in wanting to give back to the program and become a Mentor.

It feels like a real full circle moment, which helps me reflect on how far I have come and how supported I have felt along my journey with the support from the MS research community and the endMS National Training Program."

"I feel extremely fulfilled by my experience as a mentor," she says. Although Julie loves to let mentees guide their own work, she course-corrects by suggesting different ways to view problems, and admits, "I also like to get in the trenches with my team."

Having grown up in a rural environment, Julie's first paying job involved splitting, stacking and delivering wood for stoves. From this, she learned that "dedication and pride in work is relevant in any job you do, no matter how small."

When not mentoring or conducting research, Julie heads outdoors to hike and cycle. She also loves to travel. "Being immersed in new cultures is one of my favorite things," she reveals. Julie also enjoys cooking for friends, and curling up on the couch with a book, TV show or movie.

Julie Pétrin's long-term career goal is to continue her work in the field of MS impact and implementation. Noting the many avenues she can pursue (including: the non-profit sector, research, academia or industry), she concludes by stating, "Let's see where life takes me."

2024-2025 endMS SPRINT Committee

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CO-DIRECTOR,
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endMS NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Anik Schoenfeldt
MANAGER,
endMS NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM



RAPHAEL SCHNEIDER

Mentor

Originally from Germany, **Dr. Raphael Schneider** currently resides in Toronto where he is a neurologist at the BARLO MS Centre at St. Michael's Hospital, Unity Health, and scientist at the Keenan Research Centre for Biomedical Research. He is also an Elizabeth S. Barford Early Career Professor in multiple sclerosis in the Department of Medicine, at the University of Toronto.

His path to becoming an MD began at the University of Freiburg in Germany. He later obtained his PhD in neuroscience from the University of Toronto, where he also completed his residency in neurology.

Before embarking on a career in medicine, Raphael's first job was in landscaping. However, he readily admits that this work did nothing to prepare him for his current occupation. (He also admits that when he was in high school, he wanted to become a French teacher!)

Raphael's interest in the field of MS began with his desire to prevent MS progression in young people.

Hopeful that a cure for MS will be found within his lifetime, these days, his work focuses on Radiologically Isolated Syndrome. More specifically, cause

and risk factors, especially biomarkers (meaning, risk factors defined by biological markers on an individual level).

"The challenge of disentangling immune mechanisms," along with the hope of "translating discoveries into tangible improvements in care," are what continue to motivate him.

When asked about some of the challenges he's had to face within this field, Dr. Schneider reveals that a major issue lies in the complexity of designing studies that are both rigorous and practical within real-world settings.

On the topic of SPRINT, Dr. Schneider explains that his interest stemmed from his desire to work with trainees on a multidisciplinary project. He says the experience has been rewarding and has "reinforced my dedication to fostering the next generation of researchers in the MS field."

Having worked with highly motivated trainees, Raphael says he enjoyed watching their ideas take shape. "I have learned from their perspectives and energy, which is a constant reminder of why mentorship matters... the program has strengthened my understanding of how to support interdisciplinary collaboration and how to communicate complex ideas more clearly," he says.

Dr. Schneider reveals that mentoring has allowed him to reflect on his own career path, and to "better articulate the values and approaches" that guide his work.

When discussing his mentorship style, Raphael states, "I aim to be approachable."

Providing clear, honest feedback while still supporting independence, Dr. Schneider says he likes to encourage critical thinking.

Raphael's long-term career goal is to lead a research program that contributes to the understanding and treatment of progression in MS, while continuing to care for people who are living with MS. "It is a privilege to be part of the MS research community," he says. "I am continually inspired by the dedication of my colleagues and the strength of those living with MS."

Dr. Schneider advises future trainees to, "Be curious, ask questions, and do not be afraid to take intellectual risks. For mentors, listen carefully and remember that guidance should be adaptable to each individual."

Outside of work, Raphael enjoys biking, reading, and spending time with his family. He says these activities help him both recharge and maintain his perspective.

"Be curious, ask questions, and do not be afraid to take intellectual risks. For mentors, listen carefully and remember that guidance should be adaptable to each individual."



BOŻENA SZULC

SPRINTER

Dr. Bożena Szulc originally came from Bolesławiec, Poland, but lived in Edmonton, Alberta, until the completion of her postdoctoral studies in August 2025. In October 2025, Bożena will begin her position as an assistant professor at the faculty of biotechnology at the University of Wrocław in Poland.

Bożena received her undergraduate degree in engineering biotechnology, followed by an MSc in the biotechnology of molecular biology, and later, a PhD in science and natural science, with a specialization in biochemistry at the University of Wrocław.

Currently, she is studying glycan changes in the cuprizone model of Multiple Sclerosis. "I've always been interested in studying the brain, and I had the opportunity to join Dr. Jason Plemel's lab for my postdoctoral studies," Bożena reveals.

She explains that Dr. Plemel's research focuses on understanding the mechanisms of demyelination and remyelination in MS, and on "how to prevent the former while promoting the latter."

After joining Dr. Plemel's lab, Bożena became fascinated by the complexity of MS. She felt compelled to delve deeper within the field due to the many questions and challenges MS presents. (Why do lesions appear in different regions? Why do they stop in some places? Etc.) "Neurobiology was completely new to me when I entered this field, so I had a lot to learn," she recalls.

These days, Bożena's focus is on understanding the biological processes that occur during demyelination, with the goal of identifying ways to prevent it. "I'm most intrigued by how brain cells communicate during neuroinflammation and what triggers the cascade of events that leads to MS."

"Meeting people living with MS was incredibly inspiring – they are strong and full of life, even while facing uncertainty each day. For the first time, I saw how my basic science research could directly impact people's lives, which is a rare and valuable experience in our field."

Bożena admits that it was Dr. Plemel who initially encouraged her to apply for the endMS SPRINT program. "As a glyco biologist, I honestly didn't believe I would be accepted, but thanks to his belief in me, I took the leap!"

Reflecting upon her past, Bożena recalls that her first job involved caring for an elderly person. She remembers how that work not only gave her a new perspective on life, but also taught her humility. "It showed me how precious time is. That experience made me value learning and taking risks — because time passes whether we use it or not."

To that end, Bożena says the time she spent in SPRINT was instrumental in helping her grow and broaden her perspective. She says she "met amazing people from diverse fields" and learned how to communicate with a wide audience.

"Meeting people living with MS was incredibly inspiring — they are strong and full of life, even while facing uncertainty each day. For the first time, I saw how my basic science research could directly impact people's lives, which is a rare and valuable experience in our field," she says.

Aside from learning how to both conduct a scoping review, and write more effective lay summaries, Bożena says she also gained valuable experience communicating with patients. "Honestly, everything I learned through SPRINT was new to me!" she exclaims.

Bożena's career goal is to become the first glyconeurobiologist in Poland, with a focus on cell interactions that occur in MS.

When asked if she believes a cure for MS will be found in her lifetime, Dr. Szulc replies, "That's a tough question. I hope so. But until we find the cause and properly define MS, I think a full cure will be difficult. That said, I do believe that the quality of life for people living with MS will continue to improve."

When not working, Bożena practices sports — both indoors and outdoors. She enjoys kayaking, swimming, boxing, Pilates, and cycling. "This year, I participated in the MS Bike for the first time, and it was an amazing experience!"

2024-2025 endMS Peer Review Committee

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Dr. Rashmi Kothary
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Dr. Chantel Mayo
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MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Anik Schoenfeldt
MANAGER,
endMS NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM



KAREN TWEED

Community Partner

Karen Tweed lives in Winnipeg, MB where she has been working as an administrative assistant, at Transportation Richardson International Limited, a private agribusiness, for the past 18 years.

She received her BSc in Agriculture, from the University of Manitoba.

Karen recalls her first sign of MS was severe Optic Neuritis that left her with permanent vision loss in her left eye. Although it took a while, she was eventually diagnosed with relapsing MS about 3 years later. "In addition to the vision loss, I also struggle with fatigue, numbness in my left hand and feet, and some spasticity in my left leg."

Despite these symptoms, Karen remains active in cycling, kayaking, is a para-equestrian, and her contributions to the MS community are extensive. She's been an active advocate in the MS community for just over a decade, and has been a fundraiser and ambassador for MS Bike, MS Walk, MS Read-a-Thon, as well as a Community Representative for the MS Canada grant review committee, and for the United Way of Winnipeg's Speakers Bureau.

Karen says she is fortunate in that the company she works for is very accommodating, so she is able to fulfill her MS related duties and activities, while still retaining her full-time employment.

When asked how she first found out about SPRINT, Karen explains that she'd heard about the endMS Summer School and SPRINT through her involvement with MS Canada. However, it wasn't until the program came to Winnipeg that she became actively involved, by volunteering for the *Lived Experience* panel session.

In her role as Community Representative for MS Canada, Karen Tweed sat on the research grant review committee,

where she was responsible for, among other duties, reviewing grant application summaries. "I thoroughly enjoyed the experience" she says, adding that she also enjoys staying up to date with MS research. "Being part of a SPRINT team gives me an inside look at research and makes me feel a part of it," she says. She also believes that her participation in SPRINT helps trainees with "their comfort level" in "communicating with the non-scientific community about their work."

When asked if there were any aspects about the group projects that surprised her, or peeked her curiosity, she mentions discussions involving prodrome, and a SPRINT team project on Epstein-Barr Virus (EBV) as a trigger for MS.

"Being part of a SPRINT team gives me an inside look at research and makes me feel a part of it."

She says this inspired her to change her lived experience panel talk to, *My Story of MS Prodrome*, with the inclusion of EBV as a central theme. Karen admits that this made her feel like part of the team, "and not just a fly on the wall."

Ever optimistic, Karen says she is always hoping for a cure so that we can "end MS". She suggests that if an all-encompassing cure for MS is not possible, she'd at least like for there to be "more effective treatments with less risk," and on a more personal note, to be able to "undo the damage" that's already been done.

Furthermore, Karen reveals that she is keen to learn how lifestyle factors can influence the course of MS and repair damage, specifically through diet, exercise, and meditation. "I am curious to know if my determination to remain active is part of why I have less active MS and have not progressed as quickly as others," she wonders.

For Karen Tweed, SPRINT has reaffirmed her own motivation and her hopes with regard to MS research. "I feel like student and teacher both at the same time," she says, adding that she is "grateful to have the opportunity!"



LIES VAN HOREBEEK

SPRINTer

Originally from Leuven, Belgium, **Dr. Lies Van Horebeek** received both her BSc and MSc in biomedical sciences, as well as her PhD in cognitive neuroscience from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven). Now living in Vancouver, BC, she is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of British Columbia.

Currently, Lies is using publicly available single-cell RNA sequencing (scRNA-seq) data from post-mortem human brains to study the regulatory networks involved in the differentiation and maturation of oligodendrocytes. She explains that this work focuses on how these networks vary by sex, age, brain region, and the presence of MS.

"MS affects individuals in unpredictable ways. I'm drawn to the scientific and clinical challenges it presents, and the opportunity to contribute to new discoveries that may directly improve the lives of people living with MS," Dr. Van Horebeek says.

Lies is particularly fascinated by the dynamic interplay between the immune system and the central nervous system in MS. Aiming to better understand the driving forces behind the molecular and cellular changes in oligodendrocytes in the context of MS, she hopes this knowledge will support the development of therapies that stimulate remyelination and repair of the nervous system. "The resilience of people living with MS is deeply inspiring, and I'm motivated by the possibility of translating scientific insight into better diagnostics and therapies," she adds.

"The program helped me reconnect with the MS research community and opened doors for future collaborations. It also sharpened my ability to communicate across disciplines – something I see as essential for translational research."

When discussing the challenges she has faced within her field of research, Lies explains that having to work with publicly available datasets means she's limited to using information that has already been generated. "The quality and metadata can be variable, which makes careful interpretation essential. At the same time, these datasets provide a powerful starting point for large-scale and comparative analyses."

"I'm motivated by unanswered questions, and I value careful analysis and collaboration to find meaningful answers." To that end, Dr. Van Horebeek says she joined SPRINT to expand her understanding of MS beyond the molecular and genetic level. "The program offered a unique opportunity to engage with clinical, diagnostic, and lived-experience perspectives, which has been incredibly valuable for grounding my research in the broader context of MS."

SPRINT helped Lies develop a more multidisciplinary mindset and a deeper appreciation for perspectives outside her own field. "It has also given me valuable insight into the diagnostic process and what it means to live with MS — something that has added

a new layer of purpose to my research... I've gained a better understanding of the grey zones in MS diagnosis and how complex it is to navigate between research evidence, clinical guidelines, and real-world decision-making," she says.

Affirming that her participation in SPRINT has strengthened her motivation to continue working within the field of MS, Lies Van Horebeek says the connections she's made with researchers and advocates across disciplines was inspiring. "The program helped me reconnect with the MS research community and opened doors for future collaborations. It also sharpened my ability to communicate across disciplines — something I see as essential for translational research."

Lies describes her long-term career goal as being twofold. Firstly, she aims to develop new computational methods tailored to specific MS research questions, and secondly, to support other researchers in applying bioinformatics/computational tools to improve the quality, reproducibility, and impact of their work.

When not working toward her career goals, Lies enjoys cycling, running, hiking in the mountains, going to the gym and unwinding with a good book.



BARB VAN WALLEGHEM

Community Partner

Barb Van Wallegghem, currently resides in Winnipeg, Manitoba. For the past 14 years, the retired teacher has been involved with MS Canada.

After a long and frustrating journey filled with visits to her family doctor, consultations with various specialists, and countless medical tests, Barb was diagnosed with MS in September 2011. She admits that receiving this diagnosis was "both shocking and, strangely, a relief."

Having felt unwell for such a long period of time, Barb explains that finally being able to "put a name" to her symptoms, gave her a sense of peace. She says that this knowledge enabled her to "start imagining" what her "new normal" might look like.

Over the years, through her extensive volunteer work with MS Canada, Barb has been able to connect with a vast community, comprised of others living with MS, caregivers, researchers and dedicated staff members. She says

these connections have surrounded her with "understanding, empathy, and a shared sense of purpose."

It was through this community that Barb was introduced to Dr. Soheila Karimi at the Manitoba MS Research Centre. "It was Dr. Karimi who asked me if I was interested in being on a Lived Experience panel," she says. Soon after, Barb participated in the 2024 endMS Summer School in Winnipeg as a presenter in the Lived Experience panel session.

Regarding that experience, Barb says, "Over three days, I absorbed inspiring talks, engaging sessions, and a buzz of shared purpose." She says the moment that "truly lit a spark" came during the mock examinations. "I watched as a neurologist examined a volunteer who didn't have MS, and something in me said, *this isn't the full picture*. So, I raised my hand. "Would you like to see what it's really like?" I asked. A few minutes later, I was on the examination table, giving the students a rare, authentic look at how MS reveals itself during a real neurological exam. Their reactions told me everything — I had just given them an experience they couldn't get from any textbook."

That moment had a profound impact on Barb. "I'm a teacher at heart — 25 years in the classroom taught me that the most powerful lessons come from real-life experiences. And just like that, I was hooked. I knew I had found

the perfect place to share my time, my story, and hopefully, make a lasting impact." She adds, "I'm deeply committed to encouraging young people as they grow into thoughtful learners and contribute meaningfully to the world around them."

"I'm a teacher at heart – 25 years in the classroom taught me that the most powerful lessons come from real-life experiences. And just like that, I was hooked. I knew I had found the perfect place to share my time, my story, and hopefully, make a lasting impact."

Through sharing her authentic, real-world insights, Barb hopes that SPRINTers will be reminded of how their work in the lab has a direct and profound impact on "real" people. "It's a chance to connect the cells, lesions, and data they study to the reality of individuals with MS — people who are striving every day to live their best lives, despite having MS."

Moved by the dedication and compassion of SPRINTers, Barb says, "Every student I met was fully engaged, eager to learn, and genuinely committed to expanding their understanding of MS research."

In so far as the future of MS research, Barb hopes to see more research focused on progressive MS, particularly on developing therapies that would help those living with progressive forms of MS lead fuller, more fulfilling lives. "I hope young researchers

will remain passionate about MS, committed to uncovering its cause, and dedicated to ultimately discovering a cure," she says.

Ultimately, working with SPRINTers helped Barb Van Wallegghem rekindle her hope for the future. "Seeing young people so passionate about advancing MS research is truly inspiring. Their enthusiasm, curiosity, and fresh perspectives infuse the research community with invaluable energy!"

When not volunteering, or participating in MS Canada related initiatives, Barb spends her time with family, friends and her dog, Toby. She also enjoys quilting, knitting, and crocheting.



PAUL YEJONG YOO

SPRINTer

Originally from Seoul, South Korea, **Dr. Paul Yejong Yoo** currently resides in Fort Collins, Colorado. Prior to relocating to the United States, Paul earned a BSc (Honours) in Biochemistry from Queen's University in Kingston, and both his MScA in occupational therapy, and PhD in rehabilitation science, from McGill University in Montreal. Paul then completed his postdoctoral fellowship at the Pediatric Neuroinflammatory Disorders Program at the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) in Toronto. He is now a tenure-track assistant professor at Colorado State University.

During his undergraduate studies, Paul worked at camp for children with disabilities. One of the sessions was designed as an MS camp for children with pediatric-onset MS, (referred to as POMS). "The experience of working at this summer camp was the reason I wanted to be an occupational therapist as well as a researcher," he recalls.

After completing his PhD, Paul learned about Dr. Ann Yeh's work in POMS, at SickKids. When he began working as a postdoctoral fellow in Dr. Yeh's lab, Paul discovered that many of her patients had attended that same MS camp where he'd worked. "It was a full circle moment that I will always remember and cherish," he admits.

Currently, Paul is studying the participation of children with POMS in home, school, and community activities, and their relationship to perceived environmental barriers, (in addition to health outcomes of depression, anxiety, fatigue, and quality of life). "My research focuses on reducing symptom burden and increasing quality of life in POMS through lifestyle modifications and potential environmental influences," he explains.

Dr. Yoo specifies that the progressive chronicity of MS, and the consequential symptoms (especially in POMS), are what he hopes to mitigate, and ameliorate through his research. Reflecting upon his work, Paul says "the collaborative, supportive, and passionate nature of the MS field is like nothing else. Especially the Canadian MS field. Hence, although I am still interested in working in childhood disability encompassing developmental disabilities, I plan to continue research in the pediatric MS field."

"From the wet lab to the clinic, from the boardroom to the local MS Chapter, all of it is a dynamic piece to the puzzle of MS that we are all aiming to solve together."

When discussing his career trajectory, Paul mentions the many mentors who have inspired him. He remains particularly grateful to his PhD supervisors, Drs. Keiko Shikako and Annette Majnemer (McGill University). Both instilled in him a love for research and provided him with a powerful reminder about "the true purpose of why we do what we do — to help improve the lives of children with disabilities." Paul notes that Dr. Ann Yeh was integral to the way he now approaches "impactful science and grantsmanship" and that Dr. Marcia Finlayson (Queen's University) helped him navigate the world of rehabilitation within the field of MS. All have closely supported him in his journey to a tenure-track faculty position.

Paul reveals that his participation in SPRINT allowed him to see first-hand the interdisciplinary work being done across Canada. "From the wet lab to the clinic, from the boardroom to the local MS Chapter, all of it is a dynamic piece of the puzzle of MS that we are all aiming to solve together."

SPRINT also enabled Dr. Yoo to connect with "influential, and supportive mentors and potential collaborators. The scholarship has been a strong support and addition to my CV. For this I am truly grateful," he admits.

Outside of academia, Paul enjoys both reading and running. "Reading gives me great joy and running allows me to appreciate what I am capable of, and the things that are around me."

When asked if he believes a cure for MS will be found in his lifetime, Dr. Yoo replies, "Yes, I truly believe so. As I attend the many conferences in North America and Europe, the cutting-edge research and the frontiers of science being demonstrated in the MS field is amazing to behold. Hence, my certainty."

2025 endMS Summer School Planning Committee

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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COMMUNITY MEMBER

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endMS NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM



MESSAGE FROM THE 2026 endMS SUMMER SCHOOL HOSTS

Queen's University and MS Clinic at Kingston Health Sciences Centre are pleased to invite trainees interested in MS research to the 2026 endMS Summer School in Kingston, Ontario from June 15-18, 2026. This will be a unique learning and networking opportunity, bringing to the forefront the collaborative efforts needed across preclinical, clinical and community-based researchers to conquer MS.

Our theme for the 2026 Summer School will be ***The Diversity of MS Research: From Cells to Clinic to Community***. We will explore the diverse ways that MS topics are studied by researchers from different disciplines and across the spectrum of MS research and care.

Our speakers, workshops, and small-group work will allow trainees to explore:

- (1) an array of methods used to measure MS disease and its impacts
- (2) the importance and range of daily rhythms and their relationship with symptom severity
- (3) the ways in which health and health care use are affected by the life experiences and diverse backgrounds of those with MS

Attendees will take part in interactive discussions and hands-on sessions to learn about circadian rhythmicity of neuroinflammation, ecological momentary assessment in humans and mice, and the importance of patient engagement to advance all types of MS research.

Dr. Afolasade Fakolade
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY



Dr. Marcia Finlayson
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY



Dr. Nader Ghasemlou
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY



Our Summer School program will celebrate the diversity of MS research both at Queen's University and across Canada. Our speakers have expertise across preclinical, clinical, and community-based research and in working collaboratively on multi-disciplinary, distributed research teams.

Trainees will gain insight into the value and importance of interdisciplinary collaboration needed to advance MS research and how different perspectives on a topic can move research in unexpected directions. Trainees will also have opportunities to interact with and learn from people with MS and discuss how these partnerships could move their own work in new directions.

Time will also be devoted to professional development sessions and SPRINT presentations. Our professional development sessions will address career pathways, knowledge mobilization, and best practices in preparing lay summaries.

We look forward to welcoming you to beautiful and historic Kingston, the "Limestone City" and Canada's first capital!

EDMONTON 2025

endMS SUMMER SCHOOL



“ Building friendships and research connections was a major highlight. Unlike broad conferences, the endMS Summer School offered a focused and well-rounded experience; combining both bench research and clinical perspectives. This was a valuable reminder of the bigger picture behind our work. Hearing directly from people living with MS, and seeing how engaged and hopeful they are about ongoing research, was deeply motivating and reinforced the importance of what we do.”

(2025 endMS Summer School participant)



“ As an MS patient, I always try to stay positive, but this event gave me renewed hope. The genuine interest from the doctors and researchers was uplifting.”

(2025 endMS Summer School lived experience community member)

“ Aside from presentations, new information and research skills that I was already looking for, I really liked how interactive and engaging the Summer School was. I like the fact that it allows us to get familiar with other MS research programs and clinics in other universities/hospitals in Canada.”

(2025 endMS Summer School participant)



“ I really enjoyed the opportunity to hear from profs across various disciplines in the field of MS and meeting trainees from across the country. It was amazing to see the wide range of research that is being done on MS. My favourite part of summer school was interacting with persons living with MS, and especially sitting in on a clinical visit. Especially since I am from a basic science background, it was really helpful to see how MS is treated and monitored and converse with the clinical team.”

(2025 endMS Summer School participant)



“The SPRINT program was quite honestly the highlight of my master’s degree. I am by far a more developed researcher due to the mentorship, interdisciplinary project, and connections I’ve made.”
(2024-2025 endMS SPRINT participant)



“As a SPRINTer, I discovered new strengths, built lasting connections, and became part of a collaborative team I’m excited to work with in the future. The experience has made me more confident and comfortable navigating areas beyond my current training, broadening my perspective as a researcher.”
(2024-2025 endMS SPRINT participant)

sprint ALUMNI UPDATES

■ **Dr. Nima Alaie** completed a post-doctoral position at the University of British Columbia in August 2025.

■ **Charbel Baaklini** was awarded an endMS Doctoral Studentship for his project, “CNS’s resident immune cells: Microglia, the regulators of remyelination”.

■ **Dr. Vladimir Bamm** continues to teach at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario. He works as a senior scientist in the G. Magnotta Lyme Disease Research Lab at the University of Guelph, where he is studying factors that lead to persistent symptoms after Lyme disease treatment. Dr. Bamm also leads the team in developing a semiconductor-based point-of-care diagnostic platform for rapid pathogen detection.

■ **Rochelle Benoit** joined the endMS SPRINT committee as the SPRINT alumni trainee member. She was recently awarded an endMS Doctoral Studentship for her project, “Barton tyrosine kinase inhibitors alter phenotype and function of myeloid cells in healthy controls and multiple sclerosis patients”.

■ **Dr. Katherine Cardwell** recently defended her PhD and will be starting a postdoctoral position at the University of Alberta in September with Dr. Puneeta Tandon and Dr. Ashley Hyde. The focus of her project will be on developing an App for caregivers of individuals with chronic progressive conditions, including MS.

■ **Dr. Pia Crone Christensen** works as a research scientist at Lundbeck, in Valby, Denmark. She is currently focusing on four projects that support preclinical research, in an effort to bring new medicines and therapies to patients suffering from Central Nervous System (CNS) disorders.

■ **Dr. Miguel De Avila** accepted an offer in December 2024 to work as a supplier partnership and collaboration specialist for NAV Canada. In his position, Miguel supports several initiatives that drive sustainable supply chain practices. Miguel recently became a Canadian citizen.

■ **Dr. Haritha Desu** was awarded the 5-year career transition award from the U.S. National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

■ **Dr. Afolasade Fakolade** is an assistant professor in the School of Rehabilitation Therapy at Queen’s University, in Kingston, Ontario. She was recently awarded a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Team Grant as co-principal investigator (Nominated Principal Investigator: Dr. Ruth Ann Marrie, Dalhousie University) for a project entitled, “Examining Intersections of Biographies and Biologies: Diversity and Outcomes of People with Multiple Sclerosis in Canada (iBio2Div-MS)”. A former endMS SPRINT trainee and SPRINT mentor, Dr. Fakolade is excited to be co-hosting the 2026 endMS Summer School in Kingston, Ontario.

■ **Dr. Elizabeth Gowing** graduated from McGill University in medicine and was accepted into her first-choice residency program of neurology at McGill University. She recently welcomed her daughter, Nova, in July 2025. Currently on maternity leave, she will be returning to residency in 2026.

■ **Dr. Adam Groh** defended his PhD at McGill University in early September 2025. He was recently selected for the Outstanding Scholars in Neuroscience Award Program (OSNAP) by the National Institutes of Health.

■ **Dr. Gracious Kasheke** completed and defended his PhD, aimed at identifying the most effective pro-repair therapeutics in a model of MS. He is beginning his first year of medical school at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Dr. Kasheke hopes to continue working in the field of MS, both clinically and within research.

■ **Dr. Kaarina Kowalec** was recently promoted, with tenure, to the position of associate professor. Dr. Kowalec was awarded grants for her work in MS from the US Department of Defence and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). For the CIHR Team Grant, along with Drs. Ruth Ann Marrie, Marcia Finlayson, and Afolasade Fakolade, they will investigate how biological and biographical factors affect outcomes in MS.

■ **Megan Krysak** graduated from Université de Montréal with an MSc in neuroscience last year. In July 2025, Megan began working as a research technician at Providence Therapeutics, a biotech company located in Calgary, Alberta.

■ **Dr. Kyla McKay** is a docent (associate professor) of neuroepidemiology at the Karolinska Institutet, in Stockholm, Sweden. Dr. McKay leads a team of researchers in studies focused on the etiology and long-term consequences of MS and other neuroinflammatory conditions.

■ **Dr. Evelyn Peelen** is currently working as the head of research at the clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company, Immunic AG, in Munich, Germany.

■ **Dr. Julie Pétrin** was promoted to Director, Impact and Evaluation at MS Canada.

■ **Dr. Jason Plemel** is an associate professor at the University of Alberta. He co-hosted the 2025 endMS Summer School.

■ **Katherine Sawicka** is completing her PhD. She was awarded the Whitaker Award at the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers in 2025.

■ **Dr. Ateyeh Soroush** completed her PhD in April 2025. She has since started a postdoctoral position with Dr. Jeff Dunn in the Department of Radiology at the University of Calgary, working on a Canadian Institutes of Health Research-funded human MS project.

■ **Karine Thai** is completing her PhD in Dr. Alexandre Prat’s lab, at the Université de Montréal, where she is continuing her project focused on investigating novel blood-based biomarkers in MS.

■ **Risavarshni Thevakumaran** is a PhD student at McGill University in Montreal. She is aiming to graduate in Winter 2026. Her first manuscript (under review in Neuroimage: Clinical) can be found at the following address, online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5380045>

■ **Dr. Nataliya Tokarska** successfully defended her PhD thesis in February 2025 under Dr. Valerie Verge at the University of Saskatchewan. (Titled, “Acute intermittent hypoxia (AIH) as a non-invasive therapy for the treatment of multiple sclerosis (MS)”.) Since then, Nataliya has remained in Dr. Verge’s lab as a postdoctoral fellow focusing on completing publications from her thesis work in preparation for its transition into clinical trials.

■ **Dr. Angela Wang** defended her PhD in September 2024, and started a post-doctoral position at the Salk Institute in San Diego, California, where she is continuing research in neuroimmunology, with a focus on Alzheimer’s disease.

■ **Dr. Ryan (Zitong) Wang** started his first job after graduation as a clinical research assistant at the University of Calgary’s Department of Psychiatry, in August 2025.

■ **Dr. Jordan Warford** and his family officially adopted their third child this summer (a biological sibling to their two other children). Jordan is now on parental leave, swapping data pipelines for snack pipelines. With three kids, five dogs, and a new flock of chickens, he’s finding the hardware store feels more like his satellite office, than the Department of Health.

For Summer School and SPRINT application and program guidelines, please visit our website at: www.endmstrainingprogram.ca
If you are interested in becoming a SPRINT mentor or would like more information on the program, please contact:

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The endMS National Training Program (NTP) is an initiative formed to accelerate discovery in the field of multiple sclerosis (MS) with aims to enhance knowledge and skills relevant to MS research, foster opportunities to conduct MS research in Canada, and increase intent among trainees to pursue a long term, established and productive research career in MS. The program has two main components: endMS Summer School and endMS Scholar Program for Researchers IN Training (SPRINT).

The Training Program is led by Program Director, Dr. Christina Wolfson and Co-Directors, Dr. Nathalie Arbour and Dr. Marcia Finlayson. The NTP is funded by a directed grant from MS Canada.

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