

Bright Lights for 2026-2027

We are delighted to share the 15th edition of the endMS National Training Program's *Spotlight on the Future* newsletter. In this issue, you'll find profiles of our latest graduating SPRINTers, their mentors and community partners, a welcome message from next year's hosts, and updates from our alumni.

Firstly, we extend our gratitude to Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, the MS Clinic at Kingston Health Sciences Centre, and to Drs. Marcia Finlayson, Afolasade Fakolade and Nader Ghasemlou who co-hosted this year's endMS Summer School.

This year's endMS Summer School took place from June 15th to 18th, 2026. Summer School participants were treated to varied presentations that deepened their understanding of novel MS research, related to: ***The Diversity of MS Research: From Cells to Clinic to Community***.

The 2026 endMS Summer School brought together 40 graduate students, post-doctoral and clinical fellows, for four days of intensive learning about topics including: symptom variability and access to diagnosis and care, social determinants of health, neuroinflammation, immunometabolism, MRI's, women's health, rehabilitation, caregiving and inclusive research practices. Trainees also had opportunities to interact with, and learn from, people living with MS (PLwMS). These exchanges led to ideas about how these partnerships could move trainees work in new directions. Time was also devoted to professional development sessions and SPRINT presentations. The professional development sessions addressed career pathways, knowledge mobilization, and best practices in preparing lay summaries.

We are deeply grateful to the 2025-2026 SPRINT mentors, Drs. Robert Simpson, Deepak Kaushik and Ruth Ann Marrie, for generously sharing their time, knowledge and expertise to support and inspire the next generation of MS researchers.

Over the past two years, we have expanded our engagement of community partners, including individuals living with multiple sclerosis, in the training, research, and networking opportunities available to our trainees. This year, SPRINT community partners contributed throughout the full lifecycle of team projects, from the earliest stages of project development through to completion.

Community partner engagement has also extended to program governance, with several individuals serving on key committees, helping to shape the strategic direction of our initiatives. Their perspectives and lived experiences have strengthened both the training environment and the broader program.

We are equally grateful to all community partners for their dedication, collaboration, and contributions. Their participation has been invaluable and has enriched the experience of trainees, researchers, and program leaders alike.

During Summer School, our graduating SPRINTers presented their thought-provoking and innovative interdisciplinary team projects, which included:

1) Influence of Lifestyle Factors on Immunometabolism: Implications for Multiple Sclerosis Research

2) Comorbidity in myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein antibody-mediated disease

3) How do people with multiple sclerosis, care partners and healthcare providers experience cognitive symptoms in healthcare encounters? A systematic review and meta-aggregation of qualitative research findings.

Lay summaries for the 2025-2026 SPRINT projects are available on our website.

This year, we welcomed nine new SPRINTERs to the program. (For the complete list of current SPRINTers, mentors and community partners, please see page 5.)

As always, Summer School was an enriching experience for all participants. The success of the event was a result of the dedication, passion, and enthusiasm of those 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 its excellence.

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

This Program exists thanks to the ongoing financial support from MS Canada. We are delighted to announce that Program funding was recently renewed until 2029.

As we look ahead with excitement and optimism for the future of MS research, we remain committed to learning, collaborating and strengthening the vibrant community of trainee researchers. In support of these goals, we are pleased to reveal that the 2027 endMS Summer School, will be hosted by the University of Saskatchewan.

Additional details regarding the application process will be shared in December and we are planning an online information webinar (a Summer School "teaser") in January 2027. In the meantime, we invite you to read a message from next year's Summer School hosts, (please see page 14).

It is with great pride that we wish both our new and graduating SPRINTers continued success, and a year filled with enlightening collaborations and rewarding discoveries. We look forward to seeing you in June, 2027! (To learn more about some of our SPRINT alumni, please turn to page 17.)

DR. CHRISTINA WOLFSON
Director, National Training Program

ANIK SCHOENFELDT
Manager, National Training Program

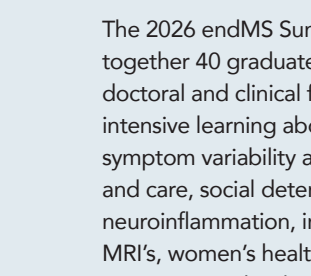
sprint
(Scholar Program for Researchers IN Training)

OUR SPRINTers:
- Hannah Bernstein
- Gabriela Blaszczyk
- Molly Pitkethly
- Mahir Rahman
- Landon Scholly
- Dr. Lauren Strasser
- Doriana Taccardi
- Thomas Worthington
- Jenn Zagrodnik

OUR MENTORS:
- Dr. Deepak Kaushik
- Dr. Ruth Ann Marrie
- Dr. Robert Simpson

OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS:
- Denise Kresic
- Karen Tweed
- Barb Van Walleghem

SPRINTers, Mentors & Community Partners



Hannah Bernstein
SPRINTer

- Born in Toronto, Ontario, ***Hannah Bernstein*** currently resides in Montreal, Quebec, where she is now in her 4th year of working on her PhD in biological and biomedical engineering (BBME), at McGill University.

Hannah previously attended the University of Waterloo, in Ontario, where she obtained her (BASc) in nanotechnology engineering, (Honours), and also received a Co-operative Education in Research certificate.

Although she has applied her neuroimaging skills to other fields, (including paediatric strokes and tuberous sclerosis), Hannah's primary focus is now on MS.

Given her academic background in neuroimaging, Hannah believes that "advanced magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can greatly help us understand and discover more about MS."

Currently, Hannah is researching advanced quantitative magnetic resonance imaging at high-field (7T), looking at white matter damage in people living with MS. She elaborates upon the many aims of this project, the first of which involves evaluating the "periventricular gradients of damage using axon and myelin sensitive measures" both cross-sectionally, and over time.

Hannah is also working on a study in which her Phase Contrast-MRI sequence is included, along with other quantitative MRI techniques. For that study, Hannah will be processing the MRI data and analyzing it. She summarizes her work by explaining that her "research aligns with the theme of understanding MS progression, and areas of neuroprotection and repair."

Hannah's first job as a swimming instructor and lifeguard, led her to the realization that she wanted to work in a health-care adjacent field, in which she could teach, "and do something that helps people... I also learned that I am a hands-on learner and enjoy working collaboratively," she says.

Before embarking on her undergraduate studies, Hannah imagined she would become a paediatrician. Now she says, "I am very happy that I have found a way to circle back to clinical work, through my MRI research in MS, in a way that suits my skills and learning style."

While on the topic of learning, Hannah reveals that she joined SPRINT to "experience a different type of research" on an interdisciplinary team in the field of MS.

She also credits SPRINT for both helping her gain a deeper appreciation for qualitative research in the field of MS, and for teaching her how important it is to hear from people with lived experience. "I have also reflected on how I could incorporate qualitative research into my own field of research," she says.

"SPRINT was such a unique opportunity, and I hope to continue interdisciplinary research in my future," Hannah says.

> *"Advanced magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can greatly help us understand and discover more about MS."*

"I have been so inspired by Barb Van Walleghem, our community partner, and her amazing work with MS Canada and the Day on the Hill. I am inspired to keep researching in MS for Barb, and people like her..."

Another inspiring figure for Hannah is her PhD supervisor, Dr. David Rudko, (McGill University, Quebec), who has been very supportive of her, and always encourages her to attend conferences. "He also allows me to get involved in different aspects of research," she says.

Hannah Bernstein's long-term career goal is to become a research associate and lecturer. "I would love to work in a lab that studies quantitative MRI research for MS... and teach medical imaging, specifically in MRI neuroimaging either at the undergraduate or graduate level."

Outside of her research work, Hannah reads, bakes, cooks, knits, and plays board games. She also enjoys playing badminton, tennis, and supporting the Habs (the Montreal Canadiens).



Gabriela Blaszczyk
SPRINTer

- ***Gabriela Blaszczyk*** earned her BSc and MSc from McGill University, in Montreal, Quebec, and is currently working on her PhD in immunology at the University of Toronto, in Ontario.

Fascinated by autoimmune issues and "how the body can turn on itself," Gabriela majored in immunology during her undergraduate training. Her interests in the intersection between autoimmune issues and the brain, led her to the study of neuroimmunology and MS research. "It is the fact that there is more unknown than known, both about the systems affected, and about MS that makes this research exciting!" she says.

Gabriela's PhD thesis focuses on discovering biomarkers to help stratify individuals with the earliest forms of MS. "More specifically, my lab follows a cohort of individuals that have characteristic MS lesions on a brain scan, but do not have MS symptoms yet," she says, explaining that this is called, "Radiologically Isolated Syndrome". Using this cohort, Gabriela is seeking immune system characteristics which can be found one year prior to symptom or lesion development. "This will help clinicians make better treatment decisions in the clinic," she says.

Gabriela confesses that "cell culture work is all about trying and failing and not understanding what went wrong. It's not for the faint of heart!" However, when asked if she has ever considered changing fields of study, Gabriela replies that she briefly contemplated doing field work with either birds or fish, "rather than being stuck in a lab indoors for most of the year." When asked why she elected to remain in her chosen field, she states, "I enjoy cell biology too much!"

A first employment experience as a sales associate taught Gabriela that she was "too honest to be good" in any sales related job. "I always thought I'd be a doctor or a teacher, and I think becoming a researcher is a happy middle," she reasons.

> *"I was already keen on pursuing MS research long term... my participation in SPRINT has broadened my ideas on what that might look like."*

More recently, Gabriela joined SPRINT with the aim of learning collaborative skills, and "establishing connections with like-minded trainees across Canada". Gabriela's SPRINT experience not only helped her develop better organizational skills, but also taught her how to manage working with groups of people who live in various time zones. She also had the opportunity to work on her first scoping review, and learned more about literature synthesis, and how to construct a literature search. Thanks to those experiences, Gabriela says she is now aware of the amount of the time and effort it takes to screen multiple papers.

"I definitely have a new appreciation for literature reviews," she adds, revealing that while she was reviewing articles for her SPRINT group project, she came across a few research papers that were "relevant and inspiring" for her own PhD project work.

Although Gabriela says she was "already keen on pursuing MS research long term," she believes her participation in SPRINT "has broadened her ideas on what that might look like."

When asked if she believes a cure for MS will be found in her lifetime, Gabriela responds in the affirmative. "Already in the past 20-30 years we have seen so much improvement, with lower numbers of individuals seen in the clinic requiring wheelchairs. It just goes to show how much better we are at identifying and treating MS."

Gabriela Blaszczyk's long term career goal is to move into industry and design clinical trials, to promote more rigorous approval for new therapies.

When not pursuing her career goals, Gabriela enjoys reading, going for walks, and biking. Having recently taken up running, she admits that being outdoors and away from her computer helps her re-energize and allows her to come up with new ideas.

2026 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
2026 endMS SUMMER SCHOOL CO-HOST, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Dr. Nathalie Arbour
CO-DIRECTOR, endMS NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM
UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

Dr. Shane Arsenault
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

Corinne Kagan
COMMUNITY PARTNER

Dr. Katherine Cardwell
SPRINT ALUMNI TRAINEE REPRESENTATIVE, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Kazma Chaudhry
COMMUNITY PARTNER

Dr. Sarah Donkers
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Dr. Charity Evans
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Dr. Nader Ghasemlou
2026 endMS SUMMER SCHOOL CO-HOST, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Dr. Jacqueline Quandt
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Dr. Lisa Walker
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

Anik Schoenfeldt
PROGRAM MANAGER, endMS NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM



Deepak K. Kaushik

Mentor

• ***Dr. Deepak K. Kaushik*** earned his PhD from the National Brain Research Centre in Gurgaon, India, prior to completing his postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Calgary, in Alberta. Now living in St. John's, Dr. Kaushik is an associate professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Deepak's first job involved working on reverse vaccinology, and molecular cloning at the National Institute of Immunology, in India. He says the experience of cloning taught him how "to build and create through biology itself, at its most fundamental level."

Although it was Deepak's interest in immunology that set the course for his career as a neuroimmunologist, when he first learned that MS "sat at the very heart of neuroimmunology" he chose to pursue advanced research in that field. "Through my work, I have had the opportunity to meet people living with MS, their families, and the broader community of researchers, clinicians, and advocates. Hearing their experiences firsthand, rather than understanding MS only through the scientific literature, has added a personal dimension to my work and continues to reinforce the importance of the research we do," he says.

Currently, Deepak's lab is working at the intersection of finding a cure for MS and understanding repair, with a particular focus on how dietary factors and immune cell metabolism influence inflammation and may offer new opportunities for intervention.

Accustomed to dealing with the inherent challenges of moving across countries and institutions to pursue training opportunities, Deepak's biggest career challenge occurred when he was trying to establish his independent research program — during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through teaching and mentorship, Deepak was able to stay grounded throughout those difficult times. He believes navigating the difficulties strengthened his resilience and adaptability and reinforced his long-term commitment to advancing MS research.

Prior to joining SPRINT as a mentor, Deepak helped organize the 2019 endMS Summer School, in Calgary, Alberta, where he also chaired several sessions. Now, when reflecting upon his recent experience as a mentor, Deepak says, "More than anything, it inspired me to want to train even more people from different backgrounds going forward. I genuinely enjoy every moment I get to contribute to MS research."

When discussing his mentorship style, Dr. Kaushik says he is "collaborative and flexible" and encourages trainees to think independently. "I recognize that junior trainees may initially feel less confident or intimidated in a group setting, so I give them additional time and encouragement to find their voice and become comfortable contributing," he explains.

For Deepak, SPRINT has broadened his "scientific and community perspectives" while creating an opportunity to "carry that learning forward" through publication. He adds that SPRINT is "a fantastic platform for the new generation of trainees, bringing new Principal Investigators (PIs) and established PIs together on the same journey."

With the long-term goal of continuing to mentor and train the next generation of scientists, Dr. Kaushik's

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advice for future trainees and mentors is to "enjoy the process — stay engaged, remain dedicated, and be open to different perspectives. Most importantly, stay connected. Networking is a key part of this experience, and some of the connections you make may grow into lifelong professional relationships or friendships. Opportunities like this do not come along very often, so make the most of the learning, the connections, and the experience along the way."

Confident that a cure for MS will be found in his lifetime, Deepak adds, "and when that day comes, I hope my lab will have contributed to it in some meaningful way. Fingers crossed."

When not in the lab or mentoring, Deepak enjoys spending time with his two young children and, when time permits, pursuing his interests in sketching and photography.



Denise Kresic

Community Partner

• Now retired, ***Denise Kresic*** lives in Edmonton, Alberta. Although Denise was diagnosed with MOGAD, (myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein antibody disease) and not with MS, she explains that at one time this condition was believed to be part of the MS spectrum, but has since been distinguished as a separate condition. However, MOGAD, like MS, is a demyelinating condition of the central nervous system.

For Denise, the journey to her diagnosis began in November 2022 when she developed a headache and the eventual loss of some of her vision, due to optic neuritis. By December of that same year, the vision in Denise's right eye was "reduced to a small patch of light out of the top peripheral". To improve her condition, she began a course of treatment, and fortunately since 2023, has regained most of her eyesight.

"I came under the treatment of Dr. Jennifer McCombe, (University of Alberta) who eventually offered me the chance to participate in SPRINT," Denise reveals.

Denise recalls that she was eager to participate, and viewed SPRINT as a good opportunity to share her experience with researchers, to help shed more light on MOGAD. More specifically, she says she wanted to help researchers "explore potential alternate avenues of treatment and understanding about MOGAD".

As one of this year's SPRINT community partners, Denise Kresic was involved in the ***Comorbidity in Myelin Oligodendrocyte Glycoprotein Antibody-Mediated Disease*** SPRINT group project. Denise says she found the group project to be both enlightening and engaging. "The professionalism and thoroughness of the researchers was impressive, and they were very nice to work with," she recalls.

Elaborating upon her experience, Denise says, "I found quite interesting the identification of the numbers of people who suffer from MOGAD and their geographical concentrations around the world." Although the topic may not have pertained to her personal diagnosis, she nevertheless felt the study was important, and says the process showed her "the breadth of knowledge yet to be discovered about MOGAD and its treatment".

When reflecting upon life since her MOGAD diagnosis, Denise shares some of the many questions she still has, including, but not limited to: *Why does MOGAD occur? Will I have a relapse in the same eye, or will it affect my other eye?*

Given her curiosity and interest in learning more about MOGAD, Denise says she remains " excited about the SPRINT program because there will be new answers every year" for people who live with MS and MOGAD.

"This was my first experience being involved in any kind of directed study and I am so encouraged by the breadth of talent presented by all of the students and researchers I met and interacted with, as well as the excellent organization of the entire SPRINT team," Denise says, before adding that she is eager to participate in future projects.

As an active person who has always enjoyed sports, including; mountain biking, skiing and hockey, Denise admits that any information she can share that could potentially help someone else have better understanding of MOGAD, and/or achieve a better outcome, "is extremely rewarding".

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Ruth Ann Marrie

Mentor

• SPRINT mentor, ***Dr. Ruth Ann Marrie*** is a professor of medicine & community health and epidemiology, and the first Gillan's Hope Multiple Sclerosis Clinical Research Chair, at Dalhousie University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Ruth Ann obtained her BSc in Chemistry from Dalhousie University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where she earned her MD. She completed a neurology residency at McGill University, in Montreal, Quebec, and earned her MS and PhD in epidemiology, from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Ruth Ann now lives in Nova Scotia.

When asked why she chose to focus her research on MS, Dr. Marrie replies, "As part of my neurology training, I did a 6-month long research project about infectious mononucleosis as a risk factor for multiple sclerosis. As part of that project, I had to read a lot about MS. I was so interested that I got permission to spend a half day a week in the MS Clinic while I worked on the project. At the end of that time, I realized there were many opportunities to better understand MS and improve care, and that I could answer those questions using epidemiological research methods."

Her career in the field of MS research now spans over 25 years, and Dr. Marrie admits that after having met so many people who are living with MS, she is "compelled to work toward improving their lives."

To that end, Dr. Marrie is currently researching "how the intersection of biological factors, such as age, sex and genetics, with biographical factors including life experiences and social determinants of health, influence outcomes in people living with MS."

For those interested in seeking additional information about this project, Examining intersections of biographies & biologies: diversity & outcomes of people with multiple sclerosis in Canada, she provides the following web address: www.queensu.ca/ibio2divms.

"I always have multiple projects on the go," Ruth Ann says. Beyond the aforementioned project, Dr. Marrie is also working on projects related to mental health surveillance, comorbidity in MS, the prodromal phase of MS, and patient-reported outcomes.

When asked about the challenges she's had to overcome within her field of research, Dr. Marrie replies. "They are the ones everyone faces – lots of research questions to address, but not enough time, or funding to do so."

Dr. Marrie has been involved in several aspects of the endMS National Training Program, including; serving on, or co-chairing committees, and hosting Summer School. Having been involved since the inception of the Program, she says she valued those experiences so much, she decided to join SPRINT as a mentor.

Dr. Marrie reveals that she too has been inspired by mentors throughout her career. She cites Dr. Christina Wolfson, (McGill University, Quebec), Dr. Jeff Cohen (Cleveland Clinic Mellen Center, Cleveland, Ohio), Dr. Richard A. Rudick (Astoria Biologica, Jupiter, Florida), and Dr. Ralph Horwitz (Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) as having been the most influential.

Ruth Ann's experience as a SPRINT mentor, gave her the "opportunity to work with great trainees and build connections with some of the future leaders in the field." She adds that her mentorship style varies. "Depending on the trainee and the circumstances, I may play a sponsorship role, be more directive, challenge, or serve as a guide."

Her advice for future trainees and/or mentors, is to "enjoy the opportunity to explore and learn together."

> *"Depending on the trainee and the circumstances, I may play a sponsorship role, be more directive, challenge, or serve as a guide."*

In her spare time, Ruth Ann sails, reads, and plays the piano. She remains hopeful that a cure for MS will be found within her lifetime.

Molly Pitkethly

SPRINTer

• ***Molly Pitkethly*** received her BSc in biomedical biology from Laurentian University, in Ontario and recently defended her MSc in the department of microbiology and immunology at the University of British Columbia. Originally from Corbeil, Ontario, Molly now resides in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

As an undergraduate student, Molly's two favorite subjects were immunology and virology. As such, she finds MS to be an interesting area of research since it provides the opportunity to work at the intersection of both. "Throughout my experiences working in MS research, I've had the opportunity to meet and work with several inspiring individuals with lived experience. Seeing their resilience and passion for supporting other people living with MS and driving research advances has been inspiring and has provided a personal context that has given my own research a greater sense of purpose and meaning," she says.

With the use of a mouse model, Molly is currently researching Epstein-Barr virus vaccines as preventative MS therapies. Summarizing her work, she says her focus lies in "understanding the protective immune response required for vaccine-mediated neuroprotection and optimizing vaccination strategies to enhance protective outcomes".

Given her interest in exploring different avenues of research, Molly decided to apply to SPRINT. "Prior to SPRINT, I had only ever worked in basic science research. For the same reason, I was also interested in working with an interdisciplinary team, which SPRINT allowed me to do."

Molly was also inspired by working with Barb Van Walleghem, a SPRINT community partner who lives with MS. "I think it also made our research stronger by providing a unique and relevant perspective to our work," she says.

> *"It seems like MS research is continuing to grow by increasing awareness or recruiting students early on in their academic career through programs like Summer School."*

Through her SPRINT experience, Molly says she learned how to use Covidence (software for managing and streamlining systematic reviews) and Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). She also learned about the methodology and importance of qualitative research. "Throughout my SPRINT experience I've gotten to see how collaborative and supportive the MS research community is, which has influenced my intent to continue to pursue MS research," she adds.

SPRINT not only provided Molly with the opportunity to diversify her research skills (which she expects will be helpful in her future career), but given her long-term goal of pursuing a career as a physician-scientist, she was especially pleased to have worked with SPRINT mentor, Dr. Robert Simpson (a specialist physician in physical medicine and rehabilitation, i.e., a 'physiatrist').

When discussing the future of MS research, Molly says she is optimistic that a cure for MS will be found. "It seems like MS research is continuing to grow by increasing awareness or recruiting students early on in their academic career through programs like Summer School."

When not pursuing her academic goals, Molly loves spending outdoors skiing, camping, hiking, playing tennis, or being by the ocean. She also enjoys volunteering, attending spinning classes, reading, and making pottery.

2026-2027 endMS SPRINTers

Dr. Seid Mussa Ahmed
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Diala El Masri
CENTRE HOSPITALIER DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

Samantha Ghanem
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Nitya Khetarpal
UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

Dr. Fanny Martinez
CENTRE HOSPITALIER DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

Jonathan Monteiro
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Preya Patel
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Siddhi Patel
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

Dr. Lucia Varela
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

2026-2027 endMS SPRINT Mentors

Dr. Chase Figley
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Dr. Adil Harroud
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Dr. Kristen Krysko
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



Mahir Rahman
SPRINTer

● Originally from Toronto, Ontario, ***Mahir Rahman*** currently resides in Calgary, Alberta. He obtained his BMSc from the University of Western Ontario, and his MSc from the University of Calgary, in Alberta.

Mahir is intrigued by the heterogeneity of MS, and hopes to "better understand what underlies the heterogeneity so we can develop more targeted treatments."

To that end, he is now studying aspects of hypoxia in MS, using the experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAE) mouse model and high-field magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). His current project involves the testing of the drug Eplerenone, with the aim of determining its impact on cerebral blood flow and health outcomes. Mahir explains that he is examining the underlying pathophysiology behind hypoxia and reductions in cerebral blood flow.

When discussing some of the challenges Mahir has had to deal with in his field of research, he provides a lengthy list of subfields that he has also had to become familiar with, including: "Immunology, MRI physics, advanced image processing, histology, and the pathophysiology of MS."

Prior to his pursuit of MS research, Mahir's first job involved working with children, as a math and science tutor. "When I was young, I borrowed books from the local library on the human body and cars, so I knew I would end up in one of those fields."

Having enjoyed the teaching aspect of his first job, Mahir says, "I found it very helpful to review basic knowledge...the act of teaching itself is useful to gauge whether I understand a topic."

On that note, Mahir says he joined SPRINT to build up his own "foundational knowledge" and to meet and learn with, and from other researchers. The Program even provided Mahir with the opportunity to write a review. "Being deeply involved in the process from start to finish was a wonderful experience. My mentor, Dr. Ruth Ann Marrie, was an amazing role model, as well. Her knowledge, composure, and work ethic will continue to inspire me for the rest of my career," he says.

Thanks to his SPRINT experience, Mahir is now "able to screen abstracts and full texts of papers," and also has the ability and confidence to plan and execute a project within a limited time frame.

"I've learned so much about myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein antibody-associated disease (MOGAD), which I wasn't familiar with until I began this project. I've also come to appreciate the importance of clear definitions and guidelines when writing and reviewing," he says.

"Taking partial ownership of this project was a great experience and I likely will use the lessons I learned in all reviews I write in the future. The opportunity to network with other researchers, both young and experienced, has opened my eyes to possible branches in my career path that I had not previously considered," he adds.

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Mahir plans to continue his pursuit of MS research, and to maintain the connections he developed during SPRINT. Ideally, he would like to become a clinician scientist. "I believe that first-hand experience with patients can help guide and inform a more relevant research path," he says.

When not pursuing his studies, Mahir enjoys reading and watching documentaries on a variety of topics, including business, geopolitics, and engineering. He also has a passion for cars, and admits to getting "wrapped up in hyper-optimizing every little detail." On a more personal note, the uncle of one of Mahir's friends lives with MS, so he and his friend often volunteer for MS fundraising events, including MS Walk and MS Bike.



Landon Scholly
SPRINTer

● ***Landon Scholly*** was born in Medicine Hat, Alberta but currently resides in Calgary, where he is pursuing his MSc in neuroscience at the University of Calgary. It was also there that Landon majored in biomedical sciences and earned his BHSc (Honours).

During his undergraduate studies, when Landon developed an interest in neuroinflammation, he recalls having been put in touch with Dr. Hedwich Kuipers, PhD (University of Calgary). That influential meeting with Dr. Kuipers helped determine the future trajectory of his studies. "By the end of my undergraduate thesis, I knew I wanted to continue doing research in the MS field," he recalls.

"The MS field intrigues and excites me as there are constantly new discoveries on cellular mechanisms and cell types involved in MS progression which shape our understanding of MS," Landon says. Although, "there are still many questions which must be answered before we are able to induce remyelination," and improve health outcomes.

When asked if any mentors have helped guide him in his chosen field, he once again cites his undergraduate and master's thesis supervisor, Dr. Hedwich Kuipers. Dr. Kuipers "has been instrumental in introducing me to trainee opportunities in the MS field and in supporting me throughout the research process," Landon says.

Currently, Landon Scholly is researching how astrocyte-produced hyaluronan interacts with T-cells. "My research focusses on finding a cure or relief, as the ultimate goal would be to highlight potential therapeutic targets to reduce the pro-inflammatory effects of reactive astrocytes," he explains.

Thus far, the biggest challenge Landon says he has faced within his field of study, is the inherent non-linear and non-progressive nature of research. "At times it can feel like nothing is working and you are not meeting the planned timeline," he admits.

> *"I know now that I want to continue performing MS research for the long term."*

The main reason Landon says he decided to join SPRINT was for the opportunity to connect with MS trainees across Canada. "I heard from previous SPRINTers that they stayed connected to the trainees they met during the endMS Summer School," he recalls.

Landon's own experience of building connections with his fellow SPRINT trainees, helped broaden his perspective, especially with regard to his research challenges. Through his peers, he learned "how they were able to deal with specific experiment problems." Landon says he is now excited about the potential outcomes of future collaborations.

"The SPRINT program has taught me how to collaborate on a project with an interdisciplinary team. It was difficult at first to coordinate schedules and make a timeline as everyone had busy and changing schedules." Now, after working on his SPRINT group project, Landon has gained confidence in organizing team projects.

The team project, and connections he built in the endMS training program, combined with the opportunities that resulted, have contributed to helping Landon cement his decision to remain within the field of MS research. "I know now that I want to continue performing MS research for the long term," he says.

Although Landon is now certain that his long-term career goal is to continue working within the field of MS, he admits to being unsure as to whether he will remain in academia, or potentially pursue a role in industry. Ultimately, however, his aim is to continue working towards helping to find a cure for MS — something he believes will happen within his lifetime.

When not actively pursuing his goals, Landon enjoys being outdoors, golfing, and watching movies with his friends.



Robert Simpson
Mentor

● ***Dr. Robert Simpson*** earned his MBChB from the University of Aberdeen, in Scotland, and his PhD from the University of Glasgow, in Scotland.

Now living in Canada, Dr. Simpson is a specialist physician in physical medicine and rehabilitation (i.e., a 'physiatrist'), and completed a fellowship in integrative medicine and compassion focused therapy.

Dr. Simpson reveals that he is inspired by the humanity of his patients, and is very interested in how individuals living with MS are able to "adapt in the face of this chronic and unpredictable condition."

> *"I am also inspired by the people with MS who support the endMS program, who dedicate their time and energy to support mutual benefit and knowledge exchange."*

His first job was as a junior doctor in internal medicine. "When I was younger, I thought I'd like to be a psychiatrist. My first job taught me the importance of being well prepared and also gave me a glimpse into some of the pain and hardship people face in relation to illness and death," Dr. Simpson explains.

Currently, his work consists not only of investigating the invisible symptoms that manifest in individuals who are living with MS, but also in studying the health behaviours and social determinants of health for those living with MS. Furthermore, Dr. Simpson's practice involves implementing psychological therapies tailored for people living with MS.

When discussing the challenges inherent to his chosen field, Robert admits that he finds the peer review process "often very discouraging." When asked if he ever considered changing fields of study as a result, he replies in the affirmative. "Yes, of course."

Reflecting upon his own academic journey, he remarks, "The academic path is not straight-forward. A lot depends on what opportunities are available."

Fortunately, throughout his studies and career, Robert has had the support and guidance of several mentors. Recalling how impactful and influential some of them have been, he admits that their "encouragement sustained" him along the way. "I think we all need mentors at different times in our lives," he adds.

Given that sentiment, Robert took it upon himself to help encourage and sustain others through his role as one of this year's SPRINT mentors. Dr. Simpson reveals that he joined SPRINT because he wanted "to support a community of people who are motivated to improve the lives of people who are living with MS in Canada."

When discussing his recent experience as one of this year's SPRINT mentors, Robert describes his mentorship style with only two words, "humble leadership".

He says that he enjoyed learning about the SPRINTers' highly diverse research projects, and admits that he came away from the experience having gleaned valuable insight. "This made the whole programme a valuable learning experience for me," he says. "It has helped me see clearer connections between different areas of enquiry such as wet lab and patient oriented research."

Further extolling the virtues of his SPRINT experience, Dr. Simpson says, "I have had the great pleasure of meeting many wonderful people from across Canada, both researchers and people with lived experience of MS." Additionally, he says his experience also proved valuable in helping him develop a new network of collaborators across this country.

Inspired by the next generation of researchers "who bring heartwarming enthusiasm and good will into the research world," Dr. Simpson adds that he is "also inspired by the people with MS who support the endMS program, who dedicate their time and energy to support mutual benefit and knowledge exchange."

Given how much he enjoys teaching, "both clinical and research," Dr. Robert Simpson confirms that his SPRINT mentorship experience validated his decision to keep working within this domain.

When not working, Robert enjoys spending time with his family, and practicing yoga.



Lauren Strasser
SPRINTer

● ***Lauren Strasser*** earned her BSc from the University of Western Ontario, her MSc from University College London, in the UK, her PhD in medicine from the Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine at McMaster University, in Ontario and completed a paediatric neurology residency, (FRCPC) at the University of Ottawa. While participating in SPRINT, Lauren was a neuroinflammatory fellow at the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids). Since completing SPRINT, she has gone on to become a paediatric neurologist at SickKids and an assistant professor at the University of Toronto, in Ontario where she now resides.

Excited by the advances that continually transform how MS is understood and treated, Dr. Strasser chose to focus on the field of MS given how "innovative and rapidly evolving" it is.

"In pediatric MS especially, there is tremendous opportunity to translate these advances into meaningful improvements in long-term outcomes and access to care. I think it's a very exciting time to enter the field as it seems that there is the opportunity to make a difference," she says.

Currently, Lauren is working on a neuroinflammatory clinical fellowship and studying Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) access within pediatric MS nationally and internationally. She explains that she is also interested in autoimmune encephalitis and the overlap between autoimmune/neuroinflammatory disorders and epilepsy.

When asked about the mentors who have encouraged her, Lauren cites Dr. Ann Yeh (University of Toronto, Ontario) as having been a "remarkable mentor" throughout the course of her career. "I met her as a resident and she helped guide me into selecting and building a custom fellowship, and in transitioning from fellowship to the next steps."

Revealing some of the challenges she has faced on her career journey thus far, Lauren says, "As many new and innovative therapeutics become available, these therapies are often quite costly and it has been challenging to advocate for, and secure funding for, therapies."

> *"In pediatric MS especially, there is tremendous opportunity to translate these advances into meaningful improvements in long-term outcomes and access to care. I think it's a very exciting time to enter the field as it seems that there is the opportunity to make a difference."*

Years prior to entering the medical field, Lauren worked as a camp counsellor at an overnight camp. She admits that from a young age she wanted to work with children with disabilities, and autism, in particular.

"I had volunteered and worked quite a bit with children with autism throughout high school and my undergraduate education. When deciding my field within medicine, I think these experiences were super helpful in solidifying for me that I wanted to work with children (over adults) with neurological conditions," she recalls.

Lauren says she joined SPRINT to "get a sense of foundational research within neuroimmunology and other types of research that are occurring within MS and neuroinflammation."

Given her clinical background, Lauren admits that working on her SPRINT project forced her out of her comfort zone. "I learned a lot about the foundational sciences and immunological underpinnings (specifically immunometabolism) of MS." Additionally, she says "It was great to meet and work with MS researchers and students from all around the country and see all the different aspects of what kind of research is being done!"

Dr. Strasser's long-term career goals include building her research interests within MS/pediatric demyelinating conditions, as well as within global health and medical education.

Outside of work, when weather and time permit, Lauren goes hiking and skiing. She also enjoys doing yoga and pilates, and spending time with her family.



Doriana Taccardi
SPRINTer

● Originally from Matera, Italy, ***Doriana Taccardi*** has a BSc in psychology from the University of Bologna, Italy, an MSc in clinical psychology from the University of Padova, Italy, and a PhD in biomedical & molecular sciences from Queen's University, in her current home town of Kingston, Ontario.

Doriana discovered her passion for research while working on her MSc thesis at King's College in London, England. While in London, Doriana worked within the National Health Service (NHS) in clinical research. This work proved to be transformative given that it was there that she encountered many people with chronic conditions who were struggling to manage their pain, fatigue, mood changes, and the uncertainty of their symptoms, and fluctuations thereof. Later, during her PhD studies, when she began to work in the field of MS and pain research, Doriana became fascinated by how MS affects each individual differently.

Motivated to better understand these often over-looked variabilities, Doriana's current research focuses on understanding individual differences in both MS and chronic pain.

"If we can identify why people experience symptoms differently, we can move toward more personalized approaches to care, tailoring treatments to each person's unique symptom profile," she says.

In her first professional role as a clinical support worker, Doriana worked with people who had sustained brain injuries, and individuals living with neurological conditions. Although she was still pursuing her initial goal of becoming a psychotherapist at the time, she believes that that experience shaped the way she now approaches her work. "Whether I am designing a study, collecting data, or interacting with research participants, I always try to keep the patient perspective at the centre," Doriana says.

Her more recent experience with SPRINT not only exposed her to new ways of thinking about research, but also helped her build meaningful collaborations across disciplines. Through SPRINT, Doriana became part of a supportive community with a shared goal of improving the lives of people living with MS. "Building these connections, exchanging ideas, and learning from others' experiences has been one of the most valuable parts of my training," she says. "These experiences have shaped the way I approach research and have reinforced my commitment to conducting work that is collaborative and meaningful for the MS community."

Thus far, Doriana says she has been fortunate to have had several mentors who have helped her career and development as a researcher. Among them, she names, Dr. Nader Ghasemlou (Krembil Brain Institute, University Health Network, and Queen's University, Ontario), Dr. Marcia Finlayson, (Queen's University, Ontario) and clinician-scientists, Drs. Moogeh Baharnoori (Mass General Hospital, Brigham, Massachusetts), Ana Wing, (Schroeder Ambulatory Centre, Ontario) and Doriana's SPRINT mentor, Dr. Ruth Ann Marrie (Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia).

Optimistic about the future of MS research, Doriana believes there will be significant advances toward more personalized therapies, earlier interventions, and better symptom management. "I am hopeful that my generation of researchers will contribute to this progress," she says.

With aspirations of becoming an independent scientist, Doriana would like to eventually lead a research program focused on MS and pain. Her next step toward achieving that goal, is to pursue a post-doctoral fellowship. "My goal is to bridge clinical research, implementation science, and patient-centred care to develop more targeted approaches that improve prevention, treatment, and long-term outcomes."

> *"If we can identify why people experience symptoms differently, we can move toward more personalized approaches to care, tailoring treatments to each person's unique symptom profile."*

A former competitive roller hockey player, Doriana participates in numerous activities when not doing research. She continues to stay active by going to the gym, running, and doing high-intensity exercises. "On the other end of the spectrum," she also practices yoga, meditates, spends time in nature, travels, and reads. Doriana says, "maintaining this balance helps me to do my work with more energy, creativity, and focus."

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Anik Schoenfeldt
PROGRAM MANAGER



Karen Tweed

Community Partner

● ***Karen Tweed*** lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she is an administrative assistant for Transportation & Logistics at Richardson International Limited.

Karen says she first heard the words, "probable MS" in September of 2003. At the time, a severe bout of optic neuritis left her with permanent vision loss in her left eye. "It took several years to get a confirmed diagnosis of relapsing MS," she recalls.

> *"I also wanted an inside view of MS research... I feel that my participation gives a different perspective and ensures that relevance to the patient is kept in the forefront."*

Her first year of adapting to monocular vision proved difficult for Karen, but with determination, she was able to resume some of her favorite activities, including; cycling and horseback riding. Although the relapses she experienced were infrequent, they were severe, and unfortunately, she had to give up playing soccer as a result. Nevertheless, Karen says she has since "managed to find a good work life balance."

Although her condition has remained stable since 2017, Karen has recently begun to struggle with vestibular migraines. "More recent experience has shown me that there is a lack of knowledge in how the hormonal changes of perimenopause and menopause interact with MS," she says.

Karen first learned about SPRINT and Summer School through her involvement with the MS Canada research grant review process. She recalls her reaction when she was invited to be on the lived experience panel, and attend the 2024 Summer School in Winnipeg. "It was a definite yes! I joined a SPRINT team for 2024-2025 as a Community Partner, and then attended Summer School in Edmonton, Alberta, where I joined another SPRINT team for 2025-2026."

Courtesy of her history as an ambassador for MS Canada, and her involvement with the United Way of Winnipeg's Speaker's Bureau, Karen has had years of experience with public speaking. Consequently, she says she was very comfortable sharing her lived experience as a SPRINT Community Partner. Furthermore, with a BSc in agriculture from the University of Manitoba, Karen possesses "a basic understanding of science and research." Combined, these aspects of her background gave her the confidence to believe she could contribute to SPRINT in a meaningful way.

"I also wanted an inside view of MS research," she says, adding, "I feel that my participation gives a different perspective and ensures that relevance to the patient is kept in the forefront. I also feel that it helps students and researchers communicate research in a more accessible way."

Having now participated as a Community Partner two years in a row, Karen admits, "I always knew MS was complicated, but now I see firsthand."

When discussing which aspects of the group project either surprised, or inspired her curiosity, Karen reveals that she found it exciting to have her lived experience reflected in the SPRINTers work — "specifically, how my diet and exercise choices have helped reduce symptoms," she says. Karen considers herself to be an advocate for diet and exercise research, and hopes her input will encourage the development of "more specific guidelines."

Karen's first participation in SPRINT proved life-changing, in that it inspired her to return to university. She is now enrolled in a certificate course at the University of Winnipeg's Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications, and is interested in learning how to help "communicate research to community." Karen is undertaking her current studies in preparation for her retirement.

This year, as a returning SPRINT Community Partner, Karen Tweed says she enjoyed seeing familiar faces and meeting new people. "Proud of the work the team put in," Karen says she enjoyed watching them present their work. She maintains that the "future of MS research is in great hands. I think we are finally getting closer to the root cause of MS and how to manage it."



Barb Van Walleghem

Community Partner

● Although retired from teaching full-time, ***Barb Van Walleghem*** currently works as a substitute teacher in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Barb was diagnosed with MS in 2011, following a magnetic resonance imaging appointment. Her diagnosis had been preceded by multiple visits to the doctor, consultations with various specialists, and countless medical tests.

"The news was both shocking and, strangely, a relief. I had been feeling unwell for so long that having a clear name for my symptoms brought me a sense of peace and allowed me to start imagining what my "new normal" might look like," she recalls. Since then, Barb has been involved with MS Canada.

Through the invitation of Dr. Soheila Karimi at the Manitoba MS Research Centre, Barb attended the 2024 endMS Summer School in Winnipeg, Manitoba as a presenter on the Lived Experience panel. However, during the event's mock examination session, when a neurologist was examining an individual who did not have MS, Barb decided to intervene. "Would you like to see what it's really like?" she offered. A few minutes later, Barb was on the examination table, giving students "a rare, authentic look at how MS reveals itself" during a neurological exam.

Barb recalls giving trainees an experience they couldn't get from any textbook. "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 says.

Sharing her lived experience is a way for Barb to help bridge the gap between scientific research and the everyday realities of life with MS. Barb's participation in SPRINT reminds "researchers that behind every cell, lesion, scan, and data point is a person navigating the challenges of MS while striving to live a full and meaningful life," she explains.

When reflecting upon her second stint as a SPRINT community partner this year, Barb reveals that one of the most rewarding aspects was contributing to the development of policy recommendations.

"While I have experience advocating for people living with MS, seeing how evidence and lived experience came together to shape recommendations in a research setting, gave me a new appreciation for the process," Barb says.

For Barb, working with SPRINTers has become one of the most rewarding experiences of her volunteer journey. "A teacher at heart," Barb valued the opportunity to share her perspective, and says she is grateful to have been part of a team that valued her collaboration.

Barb admits that she is looking forward to the day when MS research will no longer be needed. "Not because we have stopped searching, but because the answers have been found and a cure has become a reality." Until that day, Barb hopes researchers will continue to approach MS with curiosity, compassion, and determination," and that they "always remember the people behind the research — the individuals, families, and communities whose lives are impacted by every discovery and every advancement."

"SPRINT has reinforced my belief that meaningful change happens when knowledge, curiosity, and lived experience come together. It has strengthened my commitment to continuing to share my experiences and advocate for a future where people living with MS have better answers, better treatments, and eventually, a cure," Barb says.

"Living with MS has brought challenges and uncertainty, but working alongside these dedicated students has shown me the incredible possibilities that exist when science and lived experience come together. It has reinforced my belief that the future of MS research is in compassionate and capable hands," Barb says. "The work they are doing today has the potential to transform the future for generations to come."

> *"SPRINT has reinforced my belief that meaningful change happens when knowledge, curiosity, and lived experience come together. It has strengthened my commitment to continuing to share my experiences and advocate for a future where people living with MS have better answers, better treatments, and eventually, a cure."*



Thomas Worthington

SPRINTer

● Originally from London, England, ***Thomas Worthington*** currently resides in Vancouver, where he is a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Thomas received his BSc in medical sciences, from the University of Exeter, in the United Kingdom. Given his initial studies of foundational immunology and virology, Thomas says he was "naturally drawn" to the connection between viral infections, particularly Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), and MS. "That link first sparked my interest in the field," he recalls.

Currently, Thomas is studying the relation of EBV to MS. His research focuses on developing targeted therapies against EBV using a mouse model of MS. "Specifically, I'm investigating whether we can target and eliminate the B cells that harbour latent herpesvirus infection, with the broader goal of understanding whether this could help reduce the development or severity of MS-like disease," he explains.

When discussing some of the challenges he has faced within his field of study, Thomas says, "Unexpected results can completely change how you approach a project, which can be disconcerting, particularly when you've invested a lot of time and effort into an experiment." Upon reflection, he adds that those difficult experiences have both strengthened his resilience, and imbued him with a greater appreciation for "the process of scientific discovery".

Throughout his academic journey thus far, Thomas has received valuable guidance from several mentors. Namely, his PhD supervisor, Dr. Marc Horwitz (UBC), who has encouraged him "to develop as an independent researcher." Equally inspired by Dr. Maria Tokuyama (UBC), Thomas says, her enthusiasm and commitment to rigorous scientific methodology have influenced the way he approaches research. "Her example has reinforced for me that impactful science is not only about the research itself, but also about building an inclusive and collaborative scientific community," he says. Thomas also cites Dr. Laura Evgin (UBC) as having been "an incredible source of support and collaboration".

> *"When you're working on a PhD, it's easy to become very focused on your own experiments and questions. SPRINT has helped me step back and think more about my research from the patient perspective."*

Admittedly, Thomas participated in SPRINT for the opportunity to build relationships with other researchers "who are passionate about MS," and to learn "from people at different stages of their careers". He says that the resulting networking opportunities with "emerging scientists" and "established faculty" have been valuable for his career development. "SPRINT has allowed me to build connections with researchers at different stages of their careers and learn from their experiences, which has given me a broader perspective on the different paths I could take after my PhD."

For Thomas, the most significant takeaway from his SPRINT experience has been a greater appreciation of where his own research fits within the broader field of MS. "When you're working on a PhD, it's easy to become very focused on your own experiments and questions. SPRINT has helped me step back and think more about my research from the patient perspective."

When discussing the future of MS research, Thomas says, "I think our growing understanding of the risk factors that contribute to the development of MS could have a profound impact, not only on how we treat MS, but potentially on our ability to prevent it in the first place." He says his sense of optimism derives from the progress seen in recent years, particularly with the development of new immunotherapies. "These treatments are showing real promise, and as we continue to understand the underlying biology of MS, I think we're moving closer to being able to prevent, treat, and potentially even reverse aspects of it," he adds.

Thomas Worthington's long-term goal is to pursue an academic research career in Canada, ideally within the field of MS research. When not pursuing his current academic goals, he spends his time reading and exploring British Columbia.

2026 endMS Summer School Planning Committee

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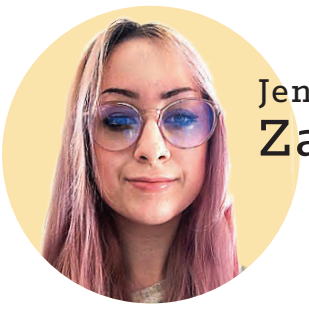
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Dr. Mays Shawawrah
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Shiropa Noor
endMS SUMMER SCHOOL COORDINATOR



Jennifer Zagrodnik

SPRINTer

● Originally from Whitby, Ontario, ***Jenn Zagrodnik*** currently resides in St. John's, Newfoundland where she is a PhD candidate at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). Previously, Jenn attended Trent University in Ontario, where she earned her BSc (Honours).

Jenn admits that the more she learns about MS, the more questions she has, and the deeper she wants to dive into exploring the mechanisms of MS. "From a scientific perspective, I find studying MS is a fascinating blend of immunology, neuroscience and pathophysiology," she says. "From a human perspective, I get frustrated for all those living with MS and am inspired and motivated to help find some answers for them," Jenn adds.

With that goal in mind, Jenn wishes to both pursue MS research and continue studying neuroimmunology. Thus far, throughout her academic and research journey, Jenn says she has been extremely fortunate to have had strong and dedicated mentors who have encouraged and motivated her on her chosen path. "I am very grateful for my supervisor Dr. Craig Moore (MUN), past lab mates Dr. Stephanie Blandford (MUN) and Dr. Rochelle Benoit (MUN) and all the lab staff and lab members that constantly inspire me," she says.

When discussing her research, Jenn reveals that one of the biggest challenges she has had to face, concerns troubleshooting failed experiments. "Learning that not every experiment works as planned has taught me the importance of patience, perseverance, and adaptability. It has also helped me develop kindness toward myself and others by recognizing that setbacks are a normal part of the research process."

Jenn believes these difficult experiences have strengthened her problem-solving skills and have also helped "reinforce the value of approaching challenges with resilience and a willingness to learn."

She reveals that prior to embarking on her MS related studies, her first job involved delivering department store magazines door to door. Throughout high school and all the way through to graduate school, Jenn worked in retail. "Working and being a student taught me that I want every workday to be different and unique. I want to explore questions I have and learn something new each day," she admits.

> *"SPRINT has helped me grow my professional network, strengthen my confidence and help prepare me for future academic and professional opportunities in research."*

Given her passion for learning about MS, Jenn participated in SPRINT in the hopes of exploring a different avenue of research.

When discussing her SPRINT experience, Jenn reveals that SPRINT increased her confidence and aptitude for research and data mobilization. She adds that working closely with her mentor and research team helped improve her communication and collaboration skills, and also gave her a deeper understanding of the qualitative research process.

Upon further reflection, Jenn admits that participating in SPRINT cemented her interest in pursuing MS research in the long term. "The experience showed me how research can contribute to solving meaningful problems and improving patient outcomes. It also gave me a greater appreciation for the collaborative and innovative nature of research, making me more motivated to continue developing my research skills and explore future opportunities in this field," she says.

Ultimately, SPRINT inspired Jenn to "embrace and incorporate" multidisciplinary research. "SPRINT has helped me grow my professional network, strengthen my confidence and help prepare me for future academic and professional opportunities in research," she says.

When asked if she believes a cure for MS will be found within her lifetime, Jenn is optimistic. "I believe we can gain a better understanding of MS pathology and create a drug that can effectively halt progression in the next few decades."

When not researching and pursuing her academic goals, Jenn loves to cook, crochet, read, and do kickboxing.

2026 endMS Summer School Review Committee

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Dr. Stephanie Zandee
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Anik Schoenfeldt
PROGRAM MANAGER



Welcome to our 2027 endMS Summer School

We are excited to share our space and our beautiful land, views and people with you from June 14th to 17th, during the upcoming 2027 endMS Summer School.

The University of Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Health Authority are committed to the honor and support of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous cultures, Indigenous values, and Indigenous languages that belong to the land of Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Métis. We extend this commitment to the lands and Treaty territories (Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10) that constitute kisiskâciwan (Saskatchewan, *"the swift current", Cree/Saulteaux*), and all Indigenous people that call kisiskâciwan home.

Our planning committee brings together clinicians, researchers and trainees from the University of Saskatchewan, the Saskatoon MS Clinic, the SK MS Drugs Program, the Office of the SK Clinical Research Chair, and the Cameco MS Neuroscience Research Centre, as well as people with MS. The theme for this year's Summer School will focus on ***"neuro recovery and repair from bench to bedside and beyond"***.

Saskatchewan has internationally leading researchers with expertise across preclinical, clinical, and community-based research and in working collaboratively on intersectoral and translational research projects. Trainees will gain insight into the value and importance of interdisciplinary collaboration needed to advance neurorecovery research in MS.

Our distinguished speakers and engaging learning activities will support trainees in expanding their knowledge on a range of research topics and methods and advances in comprehensive MS care. There will be career development panels and opportunities to interact with people affected by MS. We will have interactive skills-based workshops on communication skills and navigating difficult conversations, developing teaching / presentation style, and self-reflection.

Interactive lab sessions will include a mix of clinical research and care and neurorecovery techniques in bench science from the Cameco MS Neuroscience Research Centre. Attendees will also have the opportunity to tour Saskatoon's Canadian Light Source synchrotron and the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO) Research Centre.

We look forward to welcoming you to sunny Saskatoon, one of the top 3 sunniest cities in Canada – land of the living skies.



Some members of our planning committee including L to R: Dr. Thuy Le (Biostatistician, SK MS Drugs Program), Dr. Valerie Verge (Professor, Director of CMSNRC), Dr. Ilia Poliakov (MS Neurologist, Director of MS Clinic), Dr. Katherine Knox (MS Physiatrist, Provincial Department Head PM&R), Dr. Sarah Donkers (Associate Professor, Director MS Clinical Research), Dr. Stephanie Ballendine (MS Neurologist).

Missing from photo:
Dr. Michael Levin (MS Neurologist, SK MS Clinical Research Chair).

KINGSTON 2026 endMS Summer School



"I really enjoyed the variety of speakers and topics they presented. I particularly enjoyed the focus on equity and social determinants of health. It was so great to have individuals with lived experience attend many of the sessions and meals to be able to learn from their perspectives."

— 2026 endMS Summer School Participant





"I gained a better understanding of the current challenges faced by people with MS in their diagnosis and treatment, and how they would like to be supported. This will be very helpful for me as I consider which areas I should focus on in future research."

— 2026 endMS Summer School Participant





"I thoroughly enjoyed the diversity of topics presented, from the basic science and clinical perspectives to the stories of those living with MS. In addition, having the opportunity to engage with other students, researchers, and individuals with lived experience greatly expanded my breadth of knowledge, beyond what I would be able to learn through coursework and readings. This experience reinforced my interest and passion for studying MS and improving the lives of those living with MS."

— 2026 endMS Summer School Participant

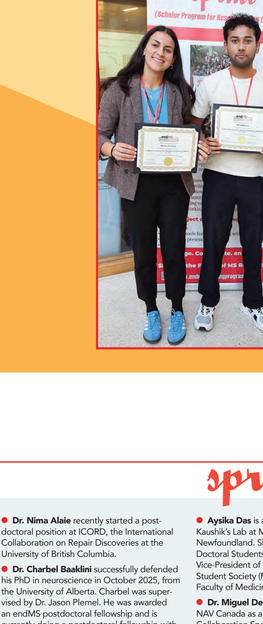




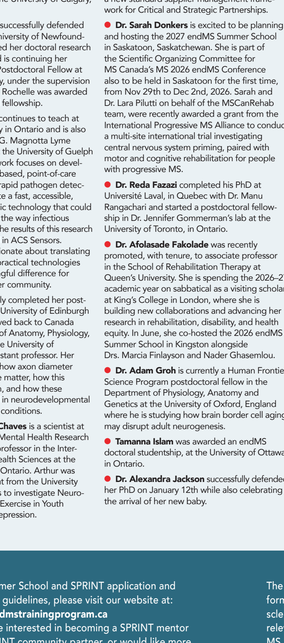


> endMS Summer School and SPRINT have been one of the most valuable experiences of my training and scientific career, thus far. The connections I've made through this program have been instrumental for my journey – and the meetings were inspirational."
>
> *2025-2026 endMS SPRINTer*





> I would, without hesitation, recommend the SPRINT mentorship program to colleagues and researchers interested in supporting the next generation of MS scientists. It provides a unique opportunity to mentor trainees from diverse backgrounds, build meaningful connections, and contribute to developing future leaders in MS research. The program is equally valuable for mentors, as it encourages reflection, collaboration, and engagement with emerging researchers and the MS community."
>
> *2025-2026 SPRINT Mentor*



> My SPRINT experience exceeded my expectations! What made this experience particularly meaningful was being engaged as a true research partner, rather than simply someone whose experiences were consulted."
>
> *2025-2026 SPRINT Community Partner*

sprint Alumni Updates

- **Dr. Nima Alaie** recently started a post-doctoral position at ICORD, the International Collaboration on Repair Discoveries at the University of British Columbia.
- **Dr. Charbel Baaklini** successfully defended his PhD in neuroscience in October 2025, from the University of Alberta. Charbel was supervised by Dr. Jason Plemel. He was awarded an endMS postdoctoral fellowship and is currently doing a postdoctoral fellowship with Dr. Voon Wee Yong at the University of Calgary, in Alberta.
- **Dr. Rochelle Benoit** successfully defended her PhD at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Rochelle completed her doctoral research with the Moore Lab and is continuing her academic journey as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Calgary, under the supervision of Dr. Hedwich Kuipers. Rochelle was awarded an endMS postdoctoral fellowship.
- **Dr. Vladimir Bamm** continues to teach at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario and is also a senior scientist in the G. Magnotta Lyme Disease Research Lab at the University of Guelph in Ontario. His current work focuses on developing a semiconductor-based, point-of-care diagnostic platform for rapid pathogen detection. The goal is to create a fast, accessible, and innovative diagnostic technology that could ultimately help improve the way infectious diseases are detected. The results of this research were recently published in ACS Sensors. Dr. Bamm remains passionate about translating scientific research into practical technologies that can make a meaningful difference for patients and the broader community.
- **Dr. Jenea Bin** recently completed her post-doctoral position at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and has moved back to Canada to join the Department of Anatomy, Physiology, and Pharmacology at the University of Saskatchewan as an assistant professor. Her new lab will investigate how axon diameter is regulated within white matter, how this influences brain function, and how these processes are disrupted in neurodevelopmental and neurodegenerative conditions.
- **Dr. Arthur R. de A. Chaves** is a scientist at The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research (IMHR) and an adjunct professor in the Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences at the University of Ottawa, in Ontario. Arthur was recently awarded a grant from the University Medical Research Funds to investigate Neuromodulation paired with Exercise in Youth (16-24 years-old) with depression.
- **Aysika Das** is a PhD candidate in Dr. Deepak Kaushik's Lab at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She was awarded an endMS Doctoral Studentship 2026. She is also the Vice-President of the Medical Graduate Student Society (MGSS), 2026-2027, in the Faculty of Medicine.
- **Dr. Miguel De Avila** continues his work with NAV Canada as a Supplier Partnership and Collaboration Specialist, focusing on rolling out a new standard supplier management framework for Critical and Strategic Partnerships.
- **Dr. Sarah Donkers** is excited to be planning and hosting the 2027 endMS Summer School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. She is part of the Scientific Organizing Committee for MS Canada's MS 2026 endMS Conference also to be held in Saskatoon for the first time, from Nov 29th to Dec 2nd, 2026. Sarah and Dr. Lara Pilutti on behalf of the MSCanRehab team, were recently awarded a grant from the International Progressive MS Alliance to conduct a multi-site international trial investigating central nervous system priming, paired with motor and cognitive rehabilitation for people with progressive MS.
- **Dr. Reda Fazazi** completed his PhD at Université Laval, in Quebec with Dr. Manu Rangachari and started a postdoctoral fellowship in Dr. Jennifer Gommerman's lab at the University of Toronto, in Ontario.
- **Dr. Afolasade Fakolade** was recently promoted, with tenure, to associate professor in the School of Rehabilitation Therapy at Queen's University. She is spending the 2026-27 academic year on sabbatical as a visiting scholar at King's College in London, where she is building new collaborations and advancing her research in rehabilitation, disability, and health equity. In June, she co-hosted the 2026 endMS Summer School in Kingston alongside Drs. Marcia Finlayson and Nader Ghasemlou.
- **Dr. Adam Groh** is currently a Human Frontier Science Program postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics at the University of Oxford, England where he is studying how brain border cell aging may disrupt adult neurogenesis.
- **Tamanna Islam** was awarded an endMS doctoral studentship, at the University of Ottawa, in Ontario.
- **Dr. Alexandra Jackson** successfully defended her PhD on January 12th while also celebrating the arrival of her new baby.
- **Dr. Camille Juzwik** and her husband recently welcomed their daughter Colette into the world. They are hoping she will become a rugby player just like her parents. Camille is based in New York City, where she works for Immunic, a late-stage biotechnology company focused on developing oral, small-molecule therapies for chronic inflammatory, autoimmune, and neurologic diseases, including MS.
- **Dr. Gracious Kasheke** continues to work his way through medical school, and has been shadowing neurologists working within the field of MS.
- **Megan Krysak** began a new position in December 2025, as a preclinical scientist at Fluid Biomed in Calgary, Alberta.
- **Dr. Keiko McFarland** works in research administration at the University of Lethbridge, in Alberta. She is still an active committee member and MS Walk Lead with MS Canada. She has two boys between the ages of 2-4.
- **Dr. Craig Moore** was recently promoted to full professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- **Jake Neufeld** recently defended his Masters of Health Sciences and is in his second year of medicine at the University of Saskatchewan.
- **Dr. Evelyn Peelen** is currently working as the head of research at the clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company, Immunic AG, in Munich, Germany.
- **Dr. Katherine Sawicka** recently defended her PhD in Clinical Epidemiology and Healthcare Research at the University of Toronto, in Ontario.
- **Dr. Karine Thai** successfully defended her PhD at the Centre de recherche du Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM). Karine's PhD research focused on profiling immune cells in the blood and brain in MS to better understand its evolution.
- **Dr. Nataliya Tokarska** recently completed her postdoctoral training in Dr. Valerie Verge's lab. She has started a new position as an Associate Biosafety Officer at the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
- **Dr. Risa Thevakumaran** recently completed her PhD at McGill University in Quebec, in biomedical engineering.
- **Dr. Kaihim Wong** successfully defended his PhD at the University of Manitoba. His research explored the prognostic potential of quantitative MRI in MS, with the goal of better predicting tissue changes and lesion evolution. Kaihim is beginning his first year of residency in diagnostic imaging physics at Indiana University School of Medicine in the United States.
- **Dr. Paul Yejong Yoo** is an assistant professor at Colorado State University. In just over a year since starting the position, he has been selected as a CADRRE K12 Scholar (NIH/NCMRR), a career development award supporting his growth as an independent investigator in pediatric rehabilitation research. He also received a Community Engaged Research Grant from the American Occupational Therapy Foundation for Co-CIRCLE (Co-creation of Child Inclusive Resources through Community Learning and Engagement), a community-based participatory study with Colorado State University (CSU) Extension sites across Colorado in the United States.

SPRINT TEAM PUBLICATIONS:

2024-2025 SPRINT team:
Dr. Kevin Champagne-Jorgensen, Dr. Mohamed Reda Fazazi, Tamanna Islam, SPRINT mentor: Dr. Marc S. Horwitz and community partner, Karen Tweed recently published their review: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016557282600192X

2024-2025 SPRINT team:
Dr. Lies Van Horebeek; Aysika Das; Jake Neufeld, and SPRINT mentor Dr. Raphael Schneider, published on their SPRINT Team Project (2026): *When is the radiologically isolated syndrome already Multiple Sclerosis according to the 2024 McDonald criteria? Current Neurology and Neuroscience Reports*, 26, Article 26. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11910-026-01495-1

Mourning the loss of Dr. Michelle Ploughman:

We extend our heartfelt condolences on the passing of Dr. Michelle Ploughman, a long-time valued member and supporter of the endMS National Training Program. Michelle was an endMS Summer School alumni (2010), endMS SPRINT mentor (2013–2014), governance committee member, and co-host of the 2017 endMS Summer School at Memorial University. Michelle made lasting contributions to MS research and training. She will be deeply missed. Her loss is felt across the MS community in Canada and beyond.

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 a SPRINT community partner, or would like more information on the program, please contact:

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514-843-1442 | 1-877-288-2570
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or

Dr. Christina Wolfson, Program Director
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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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