

Innovations in Neurology & Neurosurgery



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PEOPLE

Dr. Konersman leads neuromuscular clinic



[Chamindra Konersman, M.D.](#), directs the [Multidisciplinary Neuromuscular Clinic](#) at Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego (see story below). She is also an adult neuromuscular specialist at UC San Diego Health and an associate professor of neurosciences at UC San Diego School of Medicine.

Dr. Konersman's expertise is in the evaluation of undiagnosed neuromuscular disorders, with a special interest in genetic myopathies, muscular dystrophies, myasthenic syndromes and neuropathies. She spends most of her time combining clinical, pathological, electrodiagnostic and genetic information to solve complex neuromuscular cases. Her research interests are congenital myopathies and congenital muscular dystrophies. She is working on providing more genotypic-phenotypic tools to arrive at a genetic diagnosis and offer potential treatment options to patients.

Dr. Konersman mentors neurology residents and medical students in her clinic and has been recognized for her teaching with numerous accolades. These include the neurosciences teacher of the year award at UC San Diego for the past three years and the Whitehill prize for excellence in teaching of clinical medicine and surgery at UC San Diego in 2016.

After earning her medical degree at Drexel University College of Medicine, she completed her neurology residency at the University of California, Los Angeles, followed by a fellowship at UCLA in neuromuscular medicine in adult and pediatric neuromuscular disease.



PROGRAMS

Clinic develops innovative delivery device for new drug

The [Multidisciplinary Neuromuscular Clinic](#) team, led by [Chamindra Konersman, M.D.](#), has developed a unique and highly

innovative device to deliver the recently approved drug Spinraza (nusinersen) to spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) patients who have undergone spinal fusions.

Delivering the medicine requires Dr. Konersman to perform a lumbar puncture, but because of all the hardware in these patients, inserting the needle was not possible. As a result, her colleagues, rehabilitation medicine specialist [Andrew Skalsky, M.D.](#), and spine surgeon



[Burt Yaszay, M.D.](#), began to collaborate on a drug delivery system. They worked to create a device that would serve as a port, allowing for easy access to deliver the drug. To do this, they used existing approved devices, attaching the catheter of a baclofen pump to an Ommaya reservoir.

For other SMA patients receiving the drug (those who have not undergone spinal fusion surgery), the injections are going smoothly. Dr. Konersman credits nursing colleague Diane Carlson, R.N., of the post anesthesia care unit (PACU) team, as well as the authorization and pharmacy departments for this success.

Thirty-six of the clinic's spinal muscular atrophy patients are eligible to receive Spinraza, and 14 are currently receiving treatment. The drug has had a dramatic effect in Dr. Konersman's patients, improving their strength in as soon as a few days. Children who had not moved their fingers in years are now doing so, and one child who couldn't move her torso now does so and even wiggles when getting the lumbar puncture procedure



INNOVATIONS

Pediatric neurogeneticist wins national award

Joseph Gleeson, M.D., a member of the Division of Neurology at Rady Children's Hospital and the director of neurodevelopmental genetics and endowed chair at [Rady Children's Institute for Genomic Medicine](#), is the first recipient of the Constance Lieber Prize for Innovation in Developmental Neuroscience.



The award recognizes transformative contributions in developmental



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neuroscience leading to new treatments by an investigator under 55 years of age. It was established by the Lieber Institute for Brain Development (LIBD), an affiliate of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The award includes a \$100,000 cash prize and was presented to Dr. Gleeson in June at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.



“Dr. Gleeson is a highly regarded and accomplished developmental neuroscientist,” says LIBD director and CEO Daniel R. Weinberger, M.D. “His latest work to uncover the molecular origins of developmental behavior disorders made him a unanimous choice for the inaugural recipient of this prize.”

At the Rady Children’s Institute of Genomic Medicine, Dr. Gleeson is building a program in neurogenetics that seeks to understand the genetic basis of diseases such as epilepsy, autism and mental disability to develop new treatments. His pioneering work is supported by a \$2.5 million endowment for neuroscience provided by the Rady Children’s Hospital Auxiliary.

“I am absolutely thrilled and humbled to receive the Constance Lieber Prize for Innovation in Developmental Neuroscience,” Dr. Gleeson says. “My hope is that someday children and families with brain disorders can benefit from the work we’re doing in what I call ‘assembly neuroscience,’ that is, how the human brain is assembled, and to which I feel honored to have contributed.”

In addition to his leadership role at Rady Children’s, Dr. Gleeson is also a professor of neuroscience and pediatrics at the UC San Diego School of Medicine, adjunct professor with The Rockefeller University and investigator at the Howard Hughes Medical Institution.

The Lieber Institute for Brain Development established the new prize to honor Connie Lieber, one of the institute’s founders, for her leadership in the area of mental health research and her prescient insights about the central role of brain development in psychiatric illness. More information about the prize can be found at clprize.libd.org.

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