



Neuroscience Institute

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Ayer Neuroscience Institute adds Multiple Sclerosis services, specialists

HARTFORD – Hartford HealthCare’s Ayer Neuroscience Institute is expanding its services and is proud to announce the formation of a Comprehensive Multiple Sclerosis Program, which will be led by Brian Wong, MD, and Derek Smith, MD.

The program will focus on the diagnosis and treatment of patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) and other related disorders such as NMO, neurosarcoidosis, lupus and others.

“The formation of this new program, combined with the skills and expertise of Drs. Smith, Wong and the entire care team, ensures that patients will receive state-of-the-art treatment and care, which will result in improved outcomes,” says Mark Alberts, MD, physician-in-chief of the Institute.

Dr. Wong, a neuroimmunologist specializing in traditional and disease-modifying therapies for MS, will start in early September; Dr. Smith, who has been established in Norwich with Multiple Sclerosis Care of Connecticut, will join the Neuroscience Institute in October.

Both are familiar with the latest medications to treat these disorders, including new classes of disease-modifying treatments that can prevent debilitating relapses of MS and greatly improve the quality of life for affected patients.

“We are excited to be able to expand the breadth of services offered by the Ayer Neuroscience Institute to help people struggling with the debilitating disease of multiple sclerosis,” Dr. Alberts says. “These two physicians bring a strong background in neuroimmunology that translates into progressive and patient-centric care.”

Dr. Wong’s arrival enables Ayer to create a comprehensive Neuroimmunology Program. He comes to Hartford HealthCare from Brown University and Rhode Island Hospital in Providence, where he completed fellowship training. At Brown, he worked with a multidisciplinary team of specialists in physical therapy, neuropsychology, neuroradiology and ophthalmology. He also earned a medical degree from Georgetown University School of Medicine and a bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of Rochester.

“We welcome the expertise and skills Dr. Wong brings to the Institute. His knowledge of the latest medications to help patients affected by relapses of this debilitating disease is advanced and brings an entirely new resource to patients in this area,” Dr. Alberts says.

Neuroimmunology refers to a group of diseases that typically affect young adults during their most productive time, from 20 to 40 years of age. The diseases include MS, clinically isolated syndrome, radiologically isolated syndrome, NMO spectrum disorder and related autoimmune diseases such as encephalitis, neuropathy, myelopathy, neurosarcoidosis, epilepsy and others.

Multiple sclerosis is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system that disrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body.

“New diseases related to neuroimmunology are being identified each year. Having the expertise to properly diagnose and treat these patients and diseases reflects

Hartford HealthCare's commitment to providing the services the people of this region need, close to home," Dr. Alberts says.

Dr. Wong is also an active researcher, serving as evaluating physician with the Brown/Rhode Island Hospital arm of both the TOPAZ and ORATORIO studies. He also worked to establish a Multiple Sclerosis Patient Database for Brown/Rhode Island Hospital. He is lead author on a paper titled "Moving towards a cure for MS: Increased Immunosuppression and Striving for No Evidence of Disease Activity (NEDA)," published in the *Rhode Island Medical Journal* as well as various professional presentations. He is a member of the American Academy of Neurology.

Dr. Wong will provide ambulatory as well as in-patient services at Hartford HealthCare facilities. He will be part of a multidisciplinary team that includes rehabilitation specialists, urologists, ophthalmologists, psychologists and others to improve the care and outcomes of patients with MS and other autoimmune diseases.

Dr. Smith will be the medical director of neuroimmunology services for the Neuroscience Institute in eastern Connecticut, which includes Backus and Windham hospitals. As such, he will advise and direct the development of related services such as infusion protocols, plasma-exchange treatments and other cutting-edge medications and therapies.

A nationally-recognized MS researcher and clinician, he helped to establish the MS centers at both Brigham and Women's Hospital and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, where he has provided tertiary care for difficult MS cases for more than a decade.

A graduate of Rice University, Dr. Smith earned his medical degree at the University of Texas, Southeastern, and completed a fellowship at Brigham and Women's. He is a member of the American Academy of Neurology, the Clinical Advisory Committee of the National MS Society Chapter, and the Connecticut Neurological Society.

He has also served as the principal investigator of several multi-center clinical trials.

“Dr. Smith’s experience is a tremendous boon to the Institute as we develop a program for multiple sclerosis,” Dr. Alberts says. “He is well respected in the field and sought-after for his opinion on the most challenging cases. That is exactly the sort of expertise we want to offer our patients.”

For more information about the new Multiple Sclerosis Center with the Ayer Neuroscience Institute, go to <https://hartfordhealthcare.org/services/multiple-sclerosis-center>.

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