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RELATIVES WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS  
CAN HELP RESEARCHERS SOLVE GENETIC PUZZLE

DALLAS--Multiple sclerosis is a mystifying disease. It usually strikes young adults; it affects more women than men; and it is more common in people from colder climates. It eventually cripples some of its victims; others undergo a single, sudden episode of MS symptoms that never recur.

There are treatments for MS, most with serious side effects. But there is no cure.

"It's very difficult to find a cure until you understand in molecular detail what's causing the disease," said Dr. J. Theodore Phillips, assistant professor of neurology at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. "Trying to cure a disease like MS without understanding the underlying cause at the genetic level is an almost insurmountable task."

That's why Phillips and Dr. Staley Brod, also an assistant professor of neurology at UT Southwestern, are undertaking a study of MS patients who have at least one living parent, sibling or child who also has MS. Working with Dr. J. Donald Capra, UT Southwestern professor of microbiology, Brod and Phillips plan to study 20 families in which at least two first-degree relatives (parents, children or siblings) have MS.

MS is not the kind of hereditary disease that is directly and universally developed by everyone who inherits a particular gene or

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genetic mutation. But research indicates that a predisposition to develop MS does have a prominent genetic component.

"Susceptibility to develop MS appears to be determined by a constellation of genes, most of which are unidentified," said Brod, who was named Distinguished Young Researcher earlier this year by the President's Research Council at UT Southwestern. "This is not a search for the MS gene. There are multiple genes involved, and we hope to identify some of them."

Participants in the study will be asked to provide medical records documenting their MS diagnosis and a small amount of blood, which will be drawn at no cost to them. Participants outside the Dallas-Fort Worth area can have their blood drawn where they live and shipped to the Dallas researchers.

Although the study offers no direct benefit to participants now, it may be of great benefit to them or their families in the future, Brod and Phillips said. Their findings could lead to more effective medications with fewer side effects and eventually even to gene therapy to prevent or reverse the disease process.

Patients or family members wanting more information about the study should call (214) 688-4591.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School, affiliated teaching hospitals and outpatient clinics.