

Short Press Report for the MS Society of Baden-Württemberg (the AMSEL) and the German National MS-Society (the DMSG)

Milestones in Progressive Multiple Sclerosis

The Sobek-Foundation in Southern Germany has awarded its 2020 Research Prize to Professor Alan J. Thompson from the Queen Square Institute of Neurology and Dean of the Faculty of Brain Sciences in the University College London. It is the 21st time that this prestigious lifetime achievement award has been granted to an outstanding neuroscientist or clinician scientist in the field of multiple sclerosis (MS). The prize of 100,000 Euros is the highest in Europe and possibly worldwide.

The research achievements of the Irish-born clinician scientist Alan J. Thompson are highly estimated internationally and are ranked as milestones by the MS community. These relate to three major themes: definition of the clinical phenotype of progressive forms of MS, medical and non-medical treatments in MS, and the diagnostic and prognostic role of MRI in patients with MS. Alan J. Thompson was a pioneer in establishing the typical clinical and paraclinical features of primary progressive MS which still remains an only partly treatable subtype of MS. Moreover, he and his coworkers enhanced the diagnostic MS criteria first established by his former mentor, the late Professor W. Ian McDonald at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, London, UK, and extended the criteria of all forms in MS with more precise definitions as was hitherto possible. The enhanced McDonald criteria form the backbone of all randomized prospective clinical treatment trials worldwide. They allow a better differentiation between secondary progressive and primary progressive MS. Beyond the clinical definitions, Alan J. Thompson and his team formally investigated the MS-typical pathology by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and developed schemes to better assess the prognosis of future disease progression. In addition, he addressed the optic nerve by functional MRI. Based on this work the MS community discovered regeneration capacity via neuroplasticity. More recent activities are in exploring brain damage where Alan J. Thompson hopes to define new hypotheses that may help to better understand the disease mechanisms in primary progressive MS.

Professor Thompson has published many research articles in high-ranking scientific journals and edited state-of-the-art textbooks. He is a highly valued speaker in the field of MS worldwide. He also established an international network of experts in the Progressive MS field (International Progressive MS Alliance), addressing the still unsolved issues in Progressive MS and approaches to treatment including neurorehabilitation.