

Briefing Highlights Importance of Biomedical Research

On September 13, the NIAMS Coalition held a Congressional Briefing to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. The briefing honored Congressional Champions who have been instrumental in supporting NIAMS and the NIH and featured Dr. Stephen Katz, MD, PhD, Director of NIAMS, NIAMS-funded scientists, and patients who have benefitted from NIAMS-related research.

During the briefing the NIAMS Coalition honored three Congressional Champions for their dedication and leadership in supporting biomedical research.

Representative Michael Burgess, MD (R-TX) has sponsored and supported legislation in several important areas funded by NIAMS, many of which affect women disproportionately including osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, and lupus. Representative Anna Eshoo (D-CA) remains an ardent supporter of medical research and a strong champion for arthritis patients and the rheumatology community. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) led the charge to double NIH's budget in the 90s and continues to show great leadership and support as the chair of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and the Labor, Health, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee.



Rep. Michael Burgess, MD with patient advocate Drew Bonner.

Participants were inspired by the remarks of passionate patient advocates who live day in and day out with conditions of the bone, joint, skin and muscle. These patient advocates exemplify how the critical work of NIH and NIAMS is improving the lives of patients with chronic diseases. Janet Stearns Wyatt, PhD, RN, CRNP, voiced appreciation for the recent advancements in arthritis treatments and therapies. Lara Wine Lee, MD, who is a pediatric dermatologist and patient advocate, spoke about her passion for finding a cure and for helping others – especially children – with difficult skin diseases. Finally, participants heard from 16 year old Drew Bonner who was diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy at 6 who continues to pursue his dreams and plans on getting his driver's license in the near future.



Tom Clemens, PhD with NIAMS Director Stephen Katz, MD PhD and The Honorable John Porter.

The briefing also featured two NIAMS funded scientists: Dr. Eric Hoffman, a human geneticist who is developing potentially life-saving therapies for muscular dystrophy patients and Dr. Thomas Clemens, PhD a musculoskeletal researcher who is working on cellular and molecular mechanisms to control skeletal development and repair. Dr. Stephen Katz, MD, PhD reiterated the numerous successes NIAMS has funded over the past 25 years resulting in advanced diagnostics, treatments, and prevention strategies for patients with chronic diseases of the muscle, skin, bone and joints.

In closing, the 2011 NIAMS Coalition Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to the Honorable John Porter. Mr. Porter served 21 years as a U.S. Congressman. During his tenure as chair of the subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, NIH's budget was doubled leading to a surge of new scientific discoveries. Mr. Porter continues to be a passionate advocate for NIH and the funding of research as the Chair of Research!America and vice-chair of the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health. Mr. Porter encouraged attendees to persist in educating Congress on the life changing advancements being discovered through biomedical research.

The NIAMS Coalition is a group of more than 70 organizations (medical, patient advocacy and science based), dedicated to advancing the critical research of the NIAMS and the NIH. The Coalition's mission is to elevate understanding of the value of the NIAMS among policy makers and the public to foster increased support of the Institute.