About John L. Trotter MD (1943-2001)

The Multiple Sclerosis Clinic and research laboratories at Washington University and Barnes-Jewish Hospital were founded by Dr. John Lee Trotter in 1978. The clinic was re-named as the John L. Trotter MS Center to celebrate Dr. Trotter’s role after he died unexpectedly on July 12, 2001 at age 58. Dr. Trotter was one of the first neuroimmunologists in the world, having trained in both neurology and immunology. He was dedicated to the care of MS patients, and research on the disease to improve its treatment. To this end, he ran a busy research laboratory, as well as cared for about half the MS patients in St. Louis at the time of his death.

Dr. Trotter had a brilliant mind. He was the first person to discover than an autoantibody could be associated with cancer and cause a neurologic syndrome. Such syndromes are now called “paraneoplastic syndromes.” The antibody he identified in 1976 in a woman with malignant lymphoma is called “Anti-Tr” in his honor. Dr. Trotter was one of the first neurologists to use high-dose intravenous methylprednisolone for the treatment of MS exacerbations. He also studied the immunologic effects of this treatment (1980). He was one of the first to identify the role of cytokines in the pathogenesis of MS, publishing his report of elevated serum IL-2 in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1988.

For many years, Dr. Trotter ran the clinical spinal fluid immunology lab for Barnes-Jewish Hospital. During that time (1977), he described isoelectric focusing as a more sensitive test for detecting oligoclonal bands in spinal fluid of MS patients .

Dr. Trotter was loved by his many patients, his colleagues, his trainees and his staff. He was repeatedly chosen by his peers as one of the “Best Doctors in America.” He was always accessible to his patients and has been missed greatly since his untimely death.

A more detailed memorial tribute to Dr. Trotter can be found in the journal, Neurology, volume 57, pages 1534-35, 2001.