

## Q & A with Dr. Stanley Aronson on Butler Hospital's First Endowed Chair

MARY KORR  
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

PROVIDENCE – Following the recent celebration of The Aronson Chair for Neurodegenerative Disorders on April 12th, Butler Hospital's first endowed Chair, Dr. Stanley Aronson shared his vision for the initiative.

**Q. What were your thoughts at the Chair inaugural event, surrounded by friends, family, physicians, philanthropists and former students?**

**A.** The metaphor that I used was this: Let's not celebrate the bottle of champagne that we used to launch the ship. It is the ship, not the champagne, that is our future and is the only purpose of the establishment of this Chair. My

name on it is an irrelevance. There is a desperate need for the care and better understanding of these neurodegenerative diseases: Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, Huntington's, etc. A lot has been known and offered to palliate the progress of these diseases but patients still need years and years of competent care. None of these disorders have been conquered in terms of a cure.



PHOTOS BY AL WEEMS/COURTESY OF BUTLER HOSPITAL

Butler Hospital inaugurated its first endowed chair, The Aronson Chair for Neurodegenerative Disorders on April 12 at a celebration held at the Providence Marriott. Pictured from left, Gale Aronson, Dr. Stanley M. Aronson, Butler's President Patricia Recupero, MD, JD; and the inaugural Chair, Joseph H. Friedman, MD.



Brown medical school graduate Dr. Sarah Aronson spoke at the celebration honoring her father.

**Q. How do you envision the journey of this 'ship' as you metaphorically described it?**

**A.** The ship is just venturing into the waters. It will first assemble, by its very nature, people from different disciplines who might be interested in aspects of the same disease. You form a kind of nucleus and pretty soon you have a weekly research discussion group. This happens so often. By talking to each other, sharing ideas, that's what I'm hoping the neurodegenerative unit will be. There's always a first – as a medical

school we began with a very limited faculty. Under Joe Friedman and others, the degenerative unit will continue and advance the care of people with incurable diseases of the brain. Secondly, it will educate medical students in the nature, complexity and dimension of these diseases. And the third arm of this ship is research and to gather in funds for it.

**Q. Dr. Friedman, the inaugural Chair, has described you as a polymath.**

**How would you describe Dr. Friedman?**

**A.** First and foremost Joe is a superb neurologist, superbly trained. People come from all over to receive care at his Movement Disorders Clinic. And, I think he's unique and let me tell you why. Before going to medical school, he spent two years in Africa in the Peace Corps, working in various areas of West Africa. Since he has come here, he has used his vacations to go back to Africa

to train individuals; this past autumn he was in Kigali, Rwanda, a place of immense sorrow and people trying to rebuild after the genocide. So to me his humanity is a gift and an example.

**Q. Final thoughts on the Chair?**

**A.** There are very few centers in the U.S. devoted directly to these diseases. We need to get the brightest and the youngest and the most dedicated individuals to work here and in the process perhaps come up with ideas, get research money, and build labs step-by-step; it is a long process. It does not come about by miracles; it comes about by hard work, continuous work, and for every success there will be three or four failures, but you keep working on it.

If, by having a Chair or a nucleus, you can bring people together harmoniously to do something on behalf of people with these diseases, and gather in funds for research, from Bethesda and from the generosity of Rhode Island families, then we've accomplished our purpose. ❖



Dr. Aronson is given a round of applause by celebrants. In front row, from left, are Campaign Chair Arthur Robbins, Judy Robbins, Dr. Sarah Aronson, Dr. Susan Mates, Dr. Joseph H. Friedman, and Butler President Dr. Patricia Recupero.