



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**

**MS Learn Online
Feature Presentation
A Conversation with Clay Walker: Part 3**

Tracey

Hi I'm Tracey Kimball

Tom

and I'm Tom Kimball and we're back with the third and final segment of A Conversation with Clay Walker

Tracey

Yes, in this final webcast we'll hear how Clay Walker has Joined the MS movement and ways that each of us can make a difference.

Tom

That's right. We'll also hear more from Dr. Patricia O'Looney on the National MS Society research efforts

>>**Clay Walker: [Video]** "One thing that I have learned from MS is that it's not going to beat me. I'm not going to give up the fight for the cure. I'm not going to quit singing. I'm doing what I love doing, making music, and I'm not going to quit talking to others about doing something for themselves."

"I want to make sure that people who have multiple sclerosis know what's available and know what they can do, because the worst thing that you can do about this disease is nothing at all."

>>**Kate Milliken:** More than 400,000 people volunteer their time to support the National MS Society's Walk MS and Bike MS events each year. Yes, awesome!

Clay, so --

>>**Clay Walker:** Did you see me biking and riding horses? Did you like those tight shorts?

>>**Kate Milliken:** It's funny, because I was just about to say, I know you look good in dark denim, but bike shorts work for you, too. In all seriousness, you are a really busy guy. You've put out seven albums, you have 11 hit singles, you tour, you have a family. It's clear to everybody here that this is really important to you, this cause. And you have gone even more so than just biking to build a foundation called Band Against MS. What's the story?

>>**Clay Walker:** Well, being able -- or having this disease for as many years as I've had it, I've found desires and visions. You know, my vision is seeing MS eradicated, not just slowing it down or arresting it. I want to see it demolished, like polio was. And see the people that it has hurt, I want to see those people exalted. I want to see them healed. I want to see them get out of the wheelchairs. I believe that it's possible, but it's not possible without a vision, without somebody --

You know, I hear all of the studies and studies and this and that and everything is -- I never hear anybody go, "We're finding a disease." I haven't seen someone put their foot down and I'm like, you know what? I've been to Congress, I'm around huge celebrities all the time, and I'm like why don't I use whatever platform I have to find a cure for this disease? And that's what I've done with Band Against MS.

We're brand-new. We're three years old, but you're going to see in 2008, 2009, you're going to see Band Against MS everywhere in the national media. We're going to be raising money, and it's all going to be targeted for a cure, not for therapies, not for anything else, because there is plenty of money for that. We want to see people healed, cured.

>>**Kate Milliken:** So, this process for you has just started, in terms of all the plans that you have. So, you're right at the beginning, beginning phases.

>>**Clay Walker:** I'm ready to rock! I have an ambition and a drive and a dream that we are not going to have to -- that in 20 years, somebody is going to say MS, and they're going to say, "Well, what does that mean?" That's what I want to see.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Yes. When I got diagnosed, I was put in touch with somebody who had MS for 11 years. He was my age, he was out in Portland, Oregon. He convinced me to come to a Half Ironman Triathlon with him. I did the swim leg, he did the bike leg, we had someone else do the running leg, and we ended up raising about \$60,000 for MS research. [Applause] Thank you.

It was so awesome! Not quite as good as a hundred, but it's there, it's getting there. So, what I found, it was just such a great group of people and there was so much passion to kind of work together to fund-raise. It makes me wonder, in light of all of these people fundraising, where is the money going to?

>>**Dr. Patricia O'Looney:** Well, first of all, let me thank you both. Thanks, Clay, for all of his work, and your work, in helping us to raise --

>>**Kate Milliken:** You can buy us dinner later.

>>**Dr. Patricia O'Looney:** You know, so it was a great partnership, so it's been wonderful. This is just an incredible time for understanding multiple sclerosis. Going back to what Clay said earlier, our knowledge has just grown really to such a high point now. And so the research is going at such a fast pace, and so the MS Society spends about nearly \$50 million each year to find research. We have to cover every avenue, not just the immune system, but repair, as we talked about earlier, genetics. I mean, just every part of multiple sclerosis, every stone has to be turned over.

Also, National MS Society spends about \$120 million on education and professional programs, because obviously finding a cure for MS is so important, but we also have to think of the people who have MS today and what their needs are in terms of education. Education of professionals, educating the neurologists about multiple sclerosis.

>>**Kate Milliken:** And a support system as well.

>>**Dr. Patricia O'Looney:** And a support system.

>>**Clay Walker:** Dr. O'Looney, you know, one thing I've learned about almost all doctors, and especially neurologists, you're not very animated people. What I'm saying is me, I'm like very demonstrative. I'm like, "Let's go get 'em, bang, bang, bang!" Are you -- is there a level of excitement, is there a new -- do you feel what I felt when I talked to Sriram? Is that going on in your own mind? Do you think that we are very much closer to understanding and possibly finding a cure for this disease?

>>**Kate Milliken:** Let's not forget that Patricia has been involved with the Society as a doctor for 20 years.

>>**Dr. Patricia O'Looney:** Twenty years.

>>**Clay Walker:** That's what I'm saying. In the last few years, are you seeing something, for example, with this stem cell thing, are you seeing something that is exciting you? Are you still very on the fence about it?

>>**Patricia O'Looney:** No, no, I agree with Ram Sriram. I know him well, actually. He's a great neurologist. It is an exciting time, we've learned so much. And I'm hearing the excitement from the scientists and the neurologists themselves. I hear from the scientists that we support, the neurologists who are focused on multiple sclerosis, that they're seeing us get closer. So many questions are being answered.

A lot of the physicians get their enthusiasm from the people they treat, from the patients. So, they get excitement from -- so, we're all one big happy family.

>>**Clay Walker:** The thing I'm talking about is still in clinical trials with laboratory animals. And I know I'm taking a lot of time talking right now.

>>**Kate Milliken:** You are, it's all right.

>>**Clay Walker:** As far as the person watching out there right now, the person in here who has been debilitated by the disease considerably, is there a ray of hope that what we're talking about with the stem cell is not only an arrest of the disease, but also some type of repair?

>>**Patricia O'Looney:** Yes, I'm glad you brought that up, Clay, because we're talking about therapies and how well you both are doing. But there are -- it is a frustrating time for many people with MS who are facing difficult and debilitating times. But I think our knowledge about repair, and it's not just repairing the damage, but also restoring a function. I think that's a little bit farther down the road, but I think we're getting closer and closer.

>>**Clay Walker:** The way that Ram described it to me was, say that I have a spinal cord injury and he was explaining to me that in the spinal cord, if you have like -- it's very thin. The spinal cord is like a columnar cylinder, that if you have 75% blockage in your spinal cord from a scar that maybe was an injury, that you may not have any debility or even notice that it's there. But when it gets to 80%, there's a huge difference, and that possibly it's not so much healing the 75%, it's healing back 5% more and it becomes normal.

That's the kind of thing I'm wanting people out there who I've seen this hopelessness in their eyes. I've seen the hollow look of, "Yeah, well, for you, Clay, you're going to be fine because you have relapsing-remitting. For me, I'm in secondary-progressive." Or seeing someone in primary-progressive, and you're looking at them going, "What can I say to this person?" And now I feel like I do have something to say to them, that please don't give up, that there is a possibility.

>>>>**Kate Milliken:** And I think you make it clear that on all levels, whether it be from someone who is beginning or someone for restorative reasons, that the National MS Society and researchers are really working towards all of that.

>>**Dr. Patricia O'Looney:** Absolutely. And we can learn from other diseases, too.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Absolutely.

>>**Dr. Patricia O'Looney:** I think from Parkinson's or Alzheimer's. I mean, so it's all understanding the network and the spinal cord.

>>**Clay Walker:** I'm fired up! I'm feeling good!

>>**Kate Milliken:** Good! Well, let's go to --

>>**Clay Walker:** She didn't say no. Have you seen "Dumb and Dumber?" She didn't say no, so there's a chance, you see? There's a chance. [Applause]

>>**Kate Milliken:** It's on tape, it's being recorded. That is very true, Clay. Ann?

>>**Ann:** Yes, this question is for Clay. What are the three most important things that you do to allow you to live well with MS?

>>**Clay Walker:** I think we've probably touched on all of them, but I'll recap. Number one, newly diagnosed, please go see an MS specialist and get on a therapy. Number two, and I'd probably switch these, but I have a strong faith. I don't promote that to everybody or to the world. I'm not a preachy person, but I do have an internal faith that I lean on. It's always been my bases. Very important to have some type of faith, because without that you have no hope. The third thing, I would say, is physically take care of yourself. Not only eat good, but spend time around people that you actually like, because you're going to get a good vibe. After I got diagnosed with MS, I got rid of all of my high maintenance friends. I don't have time for that. So, make sure that the time that you do spend is quality time.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Clay, I know that we spoke before the show about something else that you've gotten involved with that's been very helpful. Do you want to do a "Downward Dog" right now?

>>**Clay Walker:** Downward facing, it's kind of hard to do in cowboy boots.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Talk about yoga.

>>**Clay Walker:** Well, you know, I'm a redneck yoga guy.

>>**Kate Milliken:** They do exist.

>>**Clay Walker:** I used to make fun of it, anybody who -- yoga, are you kidding me? I thought it was a religious practice, but the exercises that you do in that, I always feel like I can walk better or run better after I have done some yoga. So, it's very fun. You know, you can do 20 minutes. You can start out at any level and you're not going to feel very good at it at first. You're going to feel very inadequate.

But the one thing I learned about yoga that it gave me more of, is balance, and that's what everybody who has multiple sclerosis fights. You fight it with the optic nerve. Sometimes you're having double vision. You fight it with your gait, with your hands, everything. And that is the one thing that yoga does is it helps you find your center, so you can balance yourself. Sitting here, I could be sitting like this, or I can be sitting like this and feeling like a string is attached to the top of my head. I'm saying it because -- try anything, but try something! Don't sit on the sidelines.

>>**Kate Milliken:** But also to say just as a sideline for yoga, that it helps you breathe, and I think that's something that in the horrible vicious cycle of whatever you do, you've got MS, whatever you do, don't get stressed. Like don't get stressed. And, you're like, "Oh, my God, I've got MS," then you start getting stressed. I think the breathing is something that --

>>**Clay Walker:** If you go to our website, bandagainstm.org, or you can go to claywalker.com and there's a link on there. There is a woman who did this for us. She

did a special yoga MS workout for people of all levels of debilitation. And it is one of the prettiest things that I've ever seen. So, we're giving information out from here. We're getting it from the expert scientist, doctor, who is giving us a great basis.

But I'm down on the ground. I can't relate to some of the information that Dr. O'Looney has given us; I just know that it's good. But from a layman's point, whatever -- if people want to look, they can look at the website. They can see what I'm doing. It's working, and obviously whatever you're doing is working for you.

>>**Dr. Patricia O'Looney:** And this is really an important area of research, talking about rehabilitation and yoga. I mean, these are all very important issues about multiple sclerosis, and learning about exercise. But we always tell people with MS to do within your own limits, in consultation with your doctor. But certainly these are important areas that can help manage the disease and manage multiple sclerosis.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Question from the Web from Kathy for Clay. "What challenges have you had since 1996? I know that you have had days when you may have wanted to give up. What did you do on those days?" How many dark days have there been since '96?

>>**Clay Walker:** Okay. I'll share something on the Web today that I've never told anyone, because I -- I never like admitting fear or even going back into that area. But about three years -- between third and fourth year of being diagnosed, and I was telling you earlier that I was on a different therapy and there were a couple of relapses.

One of the problems that I experienced was a weak hip flexor, and I was like, "Oh, my gosh." My right toe started going down, and every step I would take it would stab into the ground. I thought of trying everything from -- there's a special little gadget that one of the doctors made that will lift your toe up and all this, and I thought I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to do it. I'm going to fight through this and I'm going to see if I can rehabilitate what I lost in that relapse, and I did it. And it was a very long, slow battle that I won.

I started walking on the beach, and I walked for about three months. I would walk a mile a day. That's all I could do without feeling my gait change. After that three-month -- between the third and the fourth month, I started trying to jog, and I fell probably every 40 yards. I hit the ground, bam! I mean, I'd be out. I made sure I did it on a weekday where there wouldn't be anybody on the beach. But that was the hardest moment and the most dark moment, other than being diagnosed. I overcame it and I got to where I could run 3.5 miles without stopping.

So, one of the studies that we're going to do with Band Against MS is we're going -- and we're developing this right now. It's in the developmental stages and I think we're going to prove this, that you can train your other muscle groups around the muscle group that has been affected because of the nerve to at least -- maybe not totally take over, but to really help that group. And I'm walking normal. I mean, if I'm walking, you don't know I have MS. But between that third and fourth year, there was a time that I was very scared. I'm in year 12 and I'm normal.

>>**Kate Milliken:** I want to make sure -- we've got a minute left, and I want to ask each one of you guys, what do you see the future of MS being, Patricia?

>>**Dr. Patricia O'Looney:** Well, I guess just to reiterate and recap maybe. It's just a hope. The hope that we are getting closer and closer to the cure, and the cure may be different for different levels of the disease. But I certainly would encourage someone who is diagnosed with MS to be on one of the therapies, to talk to a neurologist, and just to have hope.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Clay, 15 seconds.

>>**Clay Walker:** I want to be a cowboy. I'm up on my horse and I feel that I'm at last part of the charge that's going to find this cure for MS. I'm not going to stop until we have it.

>>**Kate Milliken:** I love that. That was the most succinct, beautiful statement. I would love to see you being a cowboy on my horse. Beside that, I'd like to see you at a concert, too.

>>**Clay Walker:** You got it.

>>**Kate Milliken:** For me, meeting members of the MS community has been an unexpected joy in this journey, so many people doing so many things to create a movement that will end MS. I'd like to suggest that all of you participating in this webcast visit jointhemovement.org, to learn about more opportunities to become activists, volunteers, and event participants.

Tom

Well we want to thank Country Music star Clay Walker for joining us for MS Learn Online. His perspective and thoughts have been very insightful.

Tracey

I also want to thank Kate Milliken and Dr. Patricia O'Looney for participating in this webcast.