

Donor Spotlight: Mel Wallerstein

Mel Wallerstein isn't one for compliments. In fact, when you compliment his character, he'll come back with a witty remark, such as, "It shows you can fool some of the people some of the time." But then you discover, he's one of the most charitable men around. His generosity was no less apparent than when he and the Wallerstein Foundation for Geriatric Life Improvement gave an extraordinary [\\$250,000 grant to Dr. Anna Barrett, MD, Director of Stroke Rehabilitation Research at Kessler Foundation.](#)



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[MD, Director of Stroke Rehabilitation Research at Kessler Foundation.](#)

After seeing several presentations by [Dr. Barrett](#), Mr. Wallerstein decided that he wanted to support her research efforts. The Wallerstein Foundation focuses on bringing comfort and aid to the elderly. A thousand to ten thousand dollars are the most common donations. "We rarely give what we committed to

give to support Dr. Barrett's research," he explained.

Dr. Barrett's main concerns are in finding treatment for hidden disabilities caused by stroke—disabilities that are difficult to identify and often go untreated. Aphasia, for example, is a communication disorder in which the brain has difficulty processing language. In other words, individuals know what they want to say but can't find the words needed to express their thoughts. To treat this problem, Dr. Barrett and her research team are investigating handheld communication devices.

Spatial neglect, in which some stroke survivors have difficulty navigating in 3-dimensional space, is another common effect of stroke. Objects may not be seen or may appear to be on the opposite side. This causes auto accidents, cooking injuries, and inadequate personal hygiene. [Kessler Foundation Stroke Lab](#) is investigating the effect of prism goggles on treating spatial neglect and identifying what patients would benefit from this therapy.



The stroke lab, in collaboration with Kessler Foundation's [Human Performance & Engineering Lab](#), also investigates mobility impairments caused by stroke. Scientists examine how to help people walk more effectively to increase independence.

Mr. Wallerstein understands firsthand the importance of rehabilitation after stroke. After having a stroke in 1994, he had to relearn how to walk. He is still an outpatient at Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation. Until September of 2011, he was walking with a cane. After a few health setbacks, however, he is now using a walker.

As a teenager, Mr. Wallerstein remembers getting together with friends at Henry H. Kessler's house—who went on to found Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation in 1947 and Kessler Foundation in 1985. While he didn't talk to him much, he remains fascinated with Dr. Kessler's surgeries and view of rehabilitation.

After the passing of his father when he was only 6 years old, his uncle took on the fatherly role. "I never lacked guidance from a senior male figure," he said. "It helped make me who I am today." Mr. Wallerstein followed his uncle's vision and started the foundation in 1956. With great respect for his uncle, he decided to continue this work after his uncle passed away thirty years later.

Married with three children, Mr. Wallerstein expects his son to take over the Wallerstein Foundation in the future. His son is currently a supervisor for one of the top 15 charities in the nation.

"We all should give back to others when we have the opportunity," Mr. Wallerstein declared. "I have just been very fortunate in life to have a unique opportunity to give back so I do it. But we all have some ability to help others."

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