

Gilbert M. Snider, MD

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At the beginning of his long career, people often asked Dr. Gilbert Snider why he would want to be a neurologist. Back in the 1970s and 80s, neurologists could diagnose patients with complex diseases but frequently couldn't do much to help them.

No one asks Dr. Snider that question today.

"We now have treatment options for a very large number of conditions," he says. "In some cases, we're not just addressing symptoms anymore, but getting at the basic cause of an illness. We're giving hope to patients who, not so long ago, wouldn't have had much hope at all. We no longer have to watch them just gradually get worse."

Dr. Snider, a Board certified neurologist who has practiced in Hampton Roads for 37 years, has taken a particular interest in patients with Parkinson's disease and Multiple Sclerosis (MS). His connections with those long-term patients with chronic diseases are deeply rewarding.

"It's my job to lead them through some very difficult times in their lives," he says. "We have a lot of one-on-one

discussions about what therapies are best for them based on their specific symptoms, challenges and side effects."

Happily, those conversations have grown longer in recent years. When Dr. Snider was a resident, steroids were the lone treatment option for MS patients, and those were prescribed only after flare-ups. Today, he can draw from about 15 different medications, taken subcutaneously, orally or intravenously.

Similarly, Parkinson's patients have access to many more therapies, including taking the mainstay treatment, Levodopa or L-dopa, in an inhaled form or through a pump directly to the stomach. In addition, deep brain stimulation (DBS) has had success in lessening tremors and stiffness via targeted electrical pulses that improve cell communication.

DBS also has shown great promise for dystonia, a once-untreatable condition marked by involuntary and often painful muscle contractions. Some patients now can try a surgically implanted medical device similar to a cardiac pacemaker.



"This is a treatment we wouldn't have ever dreamed of years ago," Dr. Snider notes. "Deep brain stimulation isn't for everyone, but it is exciting to finally be able to fight some of these debilitating illnesses."

The list of advances goes on: Epilepsy patients who don't respond to medication no longer have to wait a decade or longer before turning to surgery, once considered an absolute last resort but now safer and more effective. Stroke patients are making remarkable recoveries after cutting-edge procedures such as surgery to pluck out blood clots. Treatments for neuromuscular disorders such as Myasthenia gravis have multiplied rapidly in the past decade.

And in just the past five years, researchers have discovered the glymphatic system of the brain, a macroscopic waste clearance system. Repairing a system that clears out toxins could be a powerful new approach to slowing the progression of Alzheimer's disease, Dr. Snider hopes.

Understanding of the glymphatic system also has helped explain why lifestyle changes that benefit the vascular system – such as healthy eating and exercise – seem crucial for warding off dementias.

"If the vascular system is damaged, that will impair circulation in the glymphatic system," he explains. "I believe exercise, even just brisk walks, can benefit so many of my patients." As can proper sleep, he adds: "We now know that certain brain cells shrink during sleep, which allows for more interstitial fluid and more opportunity to flush out toxins. It's fascinating."

Dr. Snider, a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., followed his older brother, a retired internist in Boston, into medicine. He quickly gravitated to neurology during medical school at the University of Michigan, enjoying the cognitive nature of a specialty full of complex chronic illnesses. After completing an internship in medicine at St. Vincent's Hospital and Medical Center in New York, he returned to Michigan for a neurology residency and an electromyography fellowship.

In 1982, Dr. Snider and his wife, Judy, moved to Virginia Beach in search of a warmer climate. A member of the Chesapeake Regional Medical Group Neuroscience Institute, he has served as an Assistant Clinical Professor at Eastern Virginia Medical School and taught students in Chesapeake Regional Medical Center's nurse residency program. He is also Board certified in Electrodiagnostic Medicine and does free electromyograms for Chesapeake Care Clinic patients.

Dr. Snider is a member of the American Association of Neuromuscular & Electrodiagnostic Medicine, the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Neurology, as well as a regular honoree on Coastal Virginia Magazine's "Top Docs" lists.

Outside work, Dr. Snider is a creative writer who has published the book "Brain Warp: A Medical Thriller", about a neurologist's investigation into a plot to poison the President of Ukraine. He is currently shopping a second book, "The Last", which features an infectious disease physician with MS, to agents. He and Judy also co-write song lyrics with a country-western and pop flair and run a Web site with their works, gilsnider.com.

Meanwhile, Dr. Snider has passed along his passion for medicine and the brain to the oldest of his two sons, Jonathan, a neurologist specializing in movement disorders and a faculty member at Medical College of Virginia in Richmond. Younger son Nick is a senior project manager with an Internet firm that works to improve government efficiency and transparency.

After nearly four decades of practice, Dr. Snider remains as dedicated to his patients as ever – and more optimistic than ever.

"I have loved watching my specialty change through the years, and changing my practice along with it," he says. "I have seen what it was, what it is today, and what it may be in the future. I have so much hope for neurology." ■

