

OSF HealthCare Neurologist Makes Strides in Work to Improve Care for ALS Patients

ALS b-roll **1:18**

An average of 15 people are newly diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig's disease every day, according to the ALS Association. The incurable disease attacks nerve cells and pathways in the brain and spinal cord, eventually leaving those suffering from the disorder paralyzed.

While OSF HealthCare is not a major research center studying ALS, one doctor from the OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurological Institute is developing devices to not only help diagnose the disease the sooner, but help those with Lou Gehrig's participate in drug trials, no matter where they live.

ALS Zallek-1 **:17** **...disabling process.**

"As more treatment medications becomes available for ALS and other conditions, the diagnosis needs to be made more quickly and the patient needs to be treated in the appropriate fashion to arrest the disabling process," said Chris Zallek, MD, neurologist, OSF INI.

Dr. Zallek says it takes an average of 11 months to diagnose ALS, costing patients valuable time to get access to medications that could potentially slow the disease. Thanks to funding from the Ed and Ann Rapp Family Endowment, Dr. Zallek, in partnership with engineers from Jump Simulation, a part of OSF Innovation and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, has created four devices.

Two of those are designed to help health care providers-in-training learn to identify muscle weakness and stiffness which are characteristics of ALS and other neurological diseases sooner. One device helps clinicians more easily learn to detect the type of muscle stiffness a patient has, leading to quicker treatment of those with Parkinson's disease or Multiple Sclerosis and those who've suffered a stroke.

The last device allows physicians the capability to examine muscle strength in ALS patients from any location. Dr. Zallek says this is important as there is expected to be a 19 percent shortage of neurologists by 2025.

ALS Zallek-2 **:25** **...isn't there.**

"What's going to happen is that primary care physicians will have to do more and more neurologic care, and the way we can facilitate that is by training them better with simulators but also providing them tools to be able to examine patients better and allow neurologists to do teleneurology where the patients are located even though the neurologist isn't there," said Dr. Zallek.

Dr. Zallek says having a way to examine the strength of ALS patients from their own homes could also increase their access to drug trials that try to determine whether certain medications have a positive impact on the disease. Many of these patients can't leave their homes to travel to different research centers.

The Ed and Ann Rapp Family Endowment was created by Ed Rapp, a former Caterpillar Group President and his family following a diagnosis of ALS. The endowment supports the work of neurologists and engineers at OSF HealthCare and U of I in developing tools and solutions to break down barriers in ALS research and enhance patients' quality of life.

You can donate to this endowment [here](#).