

A world leader in MS research

PHOEBE ROTH

NATHANIEL Lizak may still be at university, but the medical student is already making his voice heard in the international conversation on multiple sclerosis (MS).

The 22-year-old presented his research at the American Committee for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis (ACTRIMS) Forum held in New Orleans last month, and won the Best Young Investigator Oral Presentation award.

"It was certainly a pretty big career step," Lizak, of Caulfield South, told *The AJN*. "Just presenting at the conference in itself was amazing ... It was very special to have received best speaker."

Lizak's interest in MS was ignited when he undertook an honours program in 2014 as part of his bachelor of medical science. During the program he was supervised by Professor Owen White, a neurologist at the Royal Melbourne and Cabrini hospitals.

"I find neurology quite fascinating, trying to understand how the brain works," Lizak said. "In MS specifically, you are dealing with young people. If you can do things to treat them, you are making a big difference."

In October last year, Lizak travelled to Barcelona to attend the European Committee for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis (ECTRIMS) Congress – the world's largest international conference devoted to MS.

Assisted by a City of Glen Eira Foundation for Youth Excellence grant, there he presented a project he had completed under White, looking at eye movements and associated differences between MS patients and non-MS patients.

Later that month, Lizak gave an address in Melbourne at the MS



Nathaniel Lizak with the award he won at the ACTRIMS forum in New Orleans.

Photo: Peter Haskin

Research Australia national conference, looking at how disability progresses at the later stages of MS, which also earned him the Young Investigators Best Oral Presentation award.

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This research project, for which he was supervised by neurologist Dr Tomas Kalincik, was also the subject of his address at the ACTRIMS conference.

Although he said the conferences in Barcelona and Melbourne were both worthwhile, he said being at the ACTRIMS forum in New Orleans was "an incredible experience".

He was sought after by the press and had opportunities to speak with highly regarded neurologists who

were among more than 500 attendees from America, Canada, and around the world.

"The research that was going on there was unbelievable. I was hearing about cutting-edge developments before they were even being published," he enthused.

MS is a disease of the central nervous system which can affect the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves. Thought there is no known cure, prospects for sufferers continue to improve with new options for treatment.

"The amount of research is becoming exponential," Lizak said.

A Bialik College graduate, Lizak is currently in the fourth year of his medical degree at Monash University. He expects his chosen specialty will be neurology when he graduates.

Watch Nathaniel speak about his MS research

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