

# Accelerated Cure Project for MS

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*Accelerating research towards a  
cure for multiple sclerosis*

## Meet Our Mighty Team

The Accelerated Cure Project is a small organization making a big impact toward curing MS worldwide. Our dynamic initiatives facilitate MS research and encourage collaboration between investigators. They engage people with MS to contribute valuable data and health information, and enable people with MS to steer research toward relevant topics. You may think it would require a large staff to accomplish so much. In fact, the ACP team is comprised of a small group of hard working people with diverse backgrounds. This month we would like to introduce you to our team.



*The ACP team (left to right): Lindsey Santiago, Jan Weaver, David Gwynne, Sara Loud, Robert McBurney, and Hollie Schmidt*

**Robert McBurney**

*President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)*

Robert has been at the helm of ACP for over 7 years. He works closely with the rest of the team to develop and implement the strategic directions of both ACP and iConquerMS. He plays a leading role in interactions with MS advocacy organizations and institutions that support MS research, representatives of healthcare companies and the research community, and people who are interested in supporting ACP's work. Robert studied chemistry and physiology as an undergraduate, and earned a PhD in neuroscience (biophysics). He did neuroscience research for a number of years, after which he joined a biotech company that was discovering and developing medicines to limit brain damage in stroke and head injury, and to repair damage to the nervous system in MS. This was his first company experience in the biotech industry. Over the next 25 years, before joining ACP, Robert was Chief Scientist or CEO of a number of companies, some of which he co-founded with colleagues. A professional recruiter approached Robert in 2011, when ACP was looking for a new President and CEO. In his words, "I was very excited about the prospect of joining an organization that was committed to open science and a very different way of accelerating MS research." Robert doesn't have a personal family connection with MS, but knows many people who have MS. When asked what he enjoys most about working for ACP, Robert states, "We are a small but "mighty team" (a term once used by the CEO of the National MS Society to describe ACP). We take on big challenges and achieve substantial results and progress. Our fundamental approach can be stated as 'we don't do the research, we create much-needed resources and capabilities that make MS research go faster and better'. We are an organization that depends on great collaborations to generate the research results that lead to improved health, healthcare and quality of life for people affected by MS." Outside of work, Robert enjoys family activities (especially with his granddaughter), food and wine, outdoor activities (especially on or in the sea), golf, music, working on home repairs/improvements, and thinking about "stuff."

**Sara Loud**

*Chief Operating Officer (COO)*

Sara has been a leader at ACP since 2005. Initially, as Repository Director, she played a key role in building the ACP Repository. Over the years she has taken on more and more responsibility. As COO, she's now responsible for making sure that "everything" gets done – from ensuring that our programs are delivering what's needed to the MS stakeholders we serve, to fundraising, staff and volunteer management, accounting, etc. Sara studied electrical engineering in college and graduate school and worked as an electrical engineer (and later a "project and people" manager) for many years in high tech. She was never fully satisfied as an engineer, and wanted use her skill set for something more meaningful. So, she returned to school to earn an MBA with a focus on Social Entrepreneurship, after which she decided to move from the high tech to the nonprofit world. Sara learned about ACP on an Internet job board many years ago. Sara didn't have a personal connection with MS until she started working for ACP. Over the years she's developed a personal connection with ACP's community of people affected by MS. When asked what she enjoys most about working for ACP, Sara states, "Do I have to pick just one thing? I love working really hard at delivering really important and novel resources to the MS community. I love the small but mighty team we've

built and the commitment we share to doing great work with meaningful impact. I love knowing that what I'm working on is really and truly accelerating research, and makes it better research thanks to the people-centered nature of our work." Outside of work, Sara loves spending time with her husband, Jim, and their twelve-year old daughter, Charlotte. They have a small beach house in Maine that, in Sara's words, is a "fixer upper – more fixer than upper", so they spend time in the spring, summer and fall balancing walks on the beach with much hammering and painting. Sara also loves to volunteer. For the last few years she's been a volunteer case reviewer for the Department of Children and Families. As such, she reviews the details of cases involving children in foster care to ensure that the people involved in the case are doing all they can to drive toward the best possible outcome.

### **Hollie Schmidt**

*VP of Scientific Operations*

Hollie has been instrumental in planning and executing ACP's scientific activities since its inception. As co-chair of the iConquerMS Research Committee, she enjoys working with people with MS, researchers, healthcare providers, research funders and others to bring new studies and research activities into being. Before ACP, Hollie had a varied career. She worked in Design for Environment programs at a major industrial company, co-founded a computer software company and worked in public policy consulting. Hollie learned about ACP through her friend, ACP's founder, who decided to start an MS nonprofit and asked if she would like to help. In Hollie's words, "Little did I know it would lead me on a journey that has lasted 17 years so far! I didn't have a personal connection with MS before my friend (ACP's founder) was diagnosed, but since then I've learned about a few additional friends who have been diagnosed with MS. And, I have a personal connection with many people I've gotten to know well through ACP." When asked what she enjoys most about working for ACP, Hollie states, "There is always something new to learn, some new challenge to address, or some new breakthrough to celebrate. Much progress has been made in MS in the past couple of decades, and there is still much left to do. It's exciting to be a part of it!" Outside of work, Hollie enjoys playing games and solving puzzles, singing in a choir, going on road trips and hosting parties. Hollie also shares, "I'm a huge animal lover and at one point had 7 pets simultaneously (4 cats, 2 toads and 1 dog). I would love to add goats and/or snakes someday!"

### **David Gwynne**

*Alliances and Collaborations*

David has overseen outreach to scientists in industry and academia for the Repository, as well as data and business development for iConquerMS for almost 3 years. David's background is in molecular genetics research, having led a number of drug discovery teams, as well as business development in biotechnology. Two of David's good friends have MS, which brings the disease closer to home. He was introduced to ACP through his long-term friendship with ACP's CEO, Robert McBurney. When asked what he enjoys most about working for ACP, David states, "I enjoy the science and the business challenge as well as the opportunity to interact with people living with MS." With regards to ACP's mission, "The 'iConquer' goal, underpinned by a commitment to the science of MS and people living with MS is especially meaningful." Outside of work, David enjoys boating and "cottage life" in Canada.

## **Lindsey Santiago**

*Development Associate*

Lindsey wears many hats at ACP. Her fundamental roles include helping with the monthly newsletter, third party fundraisers, website updates, iConquerMS, as well as daily reporting and operations. In college, Lindsey studied business, with a concentration in marketing and entrepreneurship. She focused on online and digital advertising and marketing until joining ACP, at which time she moved from the for-profit to the nonprofit sector. Lindsey was diagnosed with MS in 2010 and learned about ACP from her neurologist. She's participated in many of ACP's initiatives since then, including the Repository and iConquerMS. She shares, "When I first learned about ACP, I joined their young professionals group, and I became involved with different fundraising activities. I started volunteering at ACP when a position opened up. I applied, and the rest is history!" When asked what she enjoys most about working for ACP, Lindsey states, "I think the number of initiatives and collaborations we can be a part of is amazing with such a small team! I enjoy being able to do something to help research toward hopefully discovering a cure one day. I also enjoy the passion of people in the iConquerMS network. It amazes me that we can send out a survey asking a question, and within 24 hours have hundreds of people participate and answer because they're just as passionate to help and to find a cure!" Lindsey also shares, "The idea that a cure is tangible, and might be in the data we currently have is so important. We just need to share it and have others share what they discover in order to have ideas multiply and be successful in figuring out the answers we are looking for." When Lindsey is not at work, she is taking care of her almost 2 and a half year old son. She enjoys spending time with family and friends, whether it's going out to dinner, watching a sports event on TV, or playing outside blowing bubbles!

## **Jan Weaver**

*Operations Manager*

Jan has been helping to advance ACP's mission in various capacities since 2006. Currently she works part time and enjoys managing ACP's communications (the newsletter), as well as helping with data requests from the Repository. Jan started her career in basic research, working as a laboratory technician in both the academic and pharmaceutical settings. After taking time to raise her family, Jan returned to work and transitioned from basic to clinical research, working as a clinical research coordinator. Jan first learned about ACP through her role as research coordinator for the ACP Repository at UMass Medical School. In Jan's words, "I learned about MS through the hundreds of amazing people I enrolled in the Repository. I was touched by their stories and, to this day, am inspired by their amazing spirit." When asked what she enjoys most about working for ACP, Jan states, "It's an organization with a heart, and a cause that I believe in. I love working with a team of people that really care, about each other and about advancing the work that we do. Since I was first introduced to ACP, I've never viewed my work as a job, rather a mission to make a difference for the wonderful people I've met who live with MS." Outside of work, Jan enjoys time with her family, relaxing with her needlepoint, putting in her gardens and activities with her 5 [Leonbergers](#). This past summer, Jan ventured into the world of dog breeding and enjoyed raising her first litter of 10 Leonberger puppies.