

Pride of NZ Awards: Chronic disease led to funding battle

By Eva Corlett

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Erin Woodhams' illness inspired her husband Neil to work on MS funding. Photo / Steven McNicholl

Neil Woodhams

Lifetime Achievement

Neil Woodhams had no experience of the incurable neurological disease multiple sclerosis (MS) until his wife Erin was diagnosed with it in 1994.

There was little reliable information, limited drugs and few support services. But since then Mr Woodham has helped build national awareness of the disease and secured support through funding.

Last year he was successful in convincing Pharmac to fund two new drugs which help slow the disease's progress in 60 per cent to 70 per cent of cases.

It took "six years of battling", said Mr Woodhams, who is president of Multiple Sclerosis Auckland and vice-president for Multiple Sclerosis NZ.

For his work, he has been nominated for a Pride of New Zealand Award, in the Lifetime Achievement category.

"Few people have done as much to help those diagnosed with MS as Neil," said his nominator.

Mr Woodhams said his wife Erin has been a key factor in anything he has achieved.

"It's a partnership," he said.

"Somebody with a chronic disease - you live with it and you're very much part of it.

"And to be successful in living with it, you need to address it together rather than as individuals."

Mr Woodhams' work is done voluntarily. He gives nearly 100 hours a month to MS services while working full-time and remaining devoted to supporting Erin, who is in a wheelchair.

Mr Woodhams has been working hard to get the MS Auckland Research Trust off the ground. It will be the only funder in New Zealand that solely concentrates on funding MS research.

"For MS societies, we get less than 10 per cent of our funding from Government. We rely on donations, bequests and funding from foundations like the Lion Foundation. There is always uncertainty around the cash flow," he said.

"We are no different from many, many other charities in this regard. And those funds have declined in the last 10 years."

But he hopes the trust will become the "one place MS researchers can go to".

- [NZ Herald](#)

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