The Corinne Goldsmith Dickinson Center for Multiple Sclerosis (MS)—the lead center in a multi-institution clinical trial for MS therapeutics—has received a $19 million renewal grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The clinical trial is the largest and longest NIH-sponsored trial for the treatment of MS, a chronic disabling disease of the central nervous system. Combined with the original grant, the NIH has allocated a total of more than $44 million for this long-term trial.

Fred D. Lublin, MD, Director of the Center, Professor of Neurology, and Principal Investigator of the clinical trial, says the grant will allow researchers to continue to study two disease-modifying drugs for MS. The goal of the study is to determine if these two drugs perform better in combination in patients with MS. If the hypothesis of the study is proven, it may be possible that the combination of these FDA-approved medications are more effective together than alone in slowing the disease.

“This renewal grant expands on the original aims of the combination therapy trial, allowing us to study the mechanisms by which patients with MS develop disability,” explains Dr. Lublin. “MS patients on therapeutic protocols have never before been studied over the course of what will now be a six-year period.”

The clinical trial, known as CombiRx, is now fully enrolled with more than 1,000 newly diagnosed patients. In addition to providing comparative data, the study will also provide clinical, MRI, and genetic biomarker profiles for prognosis and response to therapy.

“These profiles will allow for more-rational treatment choices based on the individual’s makeup and provide better insights into the expected course of the disease, which can be quite variable and thus far unpredictable,” said Dr. Lublin.

MS affects more than 400,000 people and is the most prevalent disabling disorder of young adults—ages 18 to 40—in the United States. As the lead center in the study, Mount Sinai collaborates with 67 participating medical centers across the United States and Canada.