



THE MIAMI PROJECT TO CURE PARALYSIS
AN INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR SPINAL CORD INJURY RESEARCH

1/13/2007

Dear Admissions Committee,

I'm writing in support of Jeffrey Datto's reapplication to your medical school. I am a scientist at the Miami Project to Cure Paralysis, and I am in charge of the animal core facilities at the Miami Project to Cure Paralysis. I have been here for 28 years, and I have known and worked closely with Jeff for the past 6 years.

Jeffrey is diligent, dedicated, and intelligent and has consistently demonstrated these qualities in how he conducts himself in his position. As one of the most capable research associates here, he has mastered many different behavioral tests and surgical procedures. Jeff arrived prepared with a solid understanding of neuroscience and a thirst for scientific inquiry, and upon arrival, he quickly learned how to conduct various behavioral testing to assess spinal cord injury including CatWalk, GridWalk, IBB, and Grip Strength analysis. He has figured out how to do the testing more efficiently than was done before his arrival and has helped the various laboratories implement his new and improved methods. Jeff constantly exhibits his interest and enthusiasm and you can always find him teaching others how to conduct the tests that he has mastered. He is an ideal team player who works well with the other staff to complete the tasks assigned to him. He is very well organized and efficient in accomplishing surgical procedures, behavioral testing, and animal care with great initiative and a positive attitude.

Jeff has led research resulting in multiple first author publications that I have been a part of as well. One of the most important projects he has worked on involved determining the optimal dose of Schwann cells following spinal cord injury in the Fischer rat model. This was a very large project involving more than 250 animals over a period of a year, and Jeff demonstrated the ability to plan and coordinate the study, effectively overseeing a team of technicians, undergraduate students, and animal care staff who all must work together. Though it was not a planned part of the study, Jeff noted a difference in outcomes between male and female organisms, which opened up another line of inquiry. We also have submitted two more publications from his work, one in which Jeff compared multiple novel behavioral tests to assess SCI and another characterizing a new cervical SCI model. He currently is testing means of maximizing the efficiency of Schwann cell transplantation and on his own came up with an idea of combining Schwann cells with an osmotic agent mannitol, which opens the blood brain barrier, to hopefully increase the distribution of Schwann cells following transplantation. He has recently just shown that, *in vitro*, mannitol is not toxic to Schwann cells and is now testing the two together *in vivo*.

MILLER
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In addition to being an excellent researcher, Jeff is always willing to help out team members. For instance, when the head of the division of veterinary services needed someone to give a presentation to the entire University of Miami DVR staff about behavioral testing techniques to assess the effects of spinal cord injury in animal models, the first person I thought to ask was Jeff, since I knew he was very involved in teaching students and new postdoctoral fellows at the Miami Project when they began work in the various laboratories. He graciously agreed and gave an engaging presentation to a packed room. People left very excited about the animal testing we perform here.

It is evident that Jeff's superb qualities and accomplishments both as an outstanding and well-rounded researcher and as an invaluable member of the Miami Project are driven by his passion for medicine and his hard-working, open, and inquisitive nature. The same characteristics that make him a reliable, resilient, and arduous research associate will make him well suited to become a genuine, resourceful, and caring physician.

A couple years ago, as I was getting to know him better, Jeff explained to me what had happened at the end of his medical education at Thomas Jefferson University and I was shocked to have heard his story. You would never suspect such a thing happened to him given how well composed and put together he is and how well he has collaborated as a member of our team. Also, I have never heard him say anything negative publically about his past university. He always handles himself in a professional and well put together manner. It is clear to me that he has not allowed this situation to stop him from becoming a success, but has used it to motivate himself and others who work with him.

I have a lot of respect for how he has overcome such adversity and continues to move forward with his life by making significant and meaningful contributions with his work at the Miami Project. Additionally, I know he leads a weekend support group for those who have suffered from depression and anxiety in which he encourages others to keep persevering. He also is engaged in activities to help the veterans and homeless. I believe this speaks highly not only of Jeff's compassion and commitment to work with others (not only at the Miami Project), but also to his understanding of the importance of being there for those struggling in the community.

As Jeff continues to be successful with his career, I know he will continue to keep earning the respect of others as they get to know him too. For these reasons, I highly support Jeff's reapplication to your school of medicine. I personally would love to see Jeff stay here, but I fully support his desire to attend your school. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Alexander Marcillo, M.D.

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