

# Encephalitis:

## My Brain and Medicine

Encephalitis survivors and caregivers day

Friday 26 September 2025 1.30PM - 6.00PM (EDT)

IN PERSON EVENT

## Meet the Speakers

### Dr Ava Easton

#### Chief Executive of Encephalitis International



Dr Easton is a researcher and global expert on encephalitis patient outcomes and quality of life. Ava has produced and published many papers, book chapters, and a book (Life After Encephalitis) on various aspects of encephalitis and its after-effects; she also speaks at conferences and lectures around the world on the condition and its impact for patients and their families. Her expertise also extends to neuro-narratives, narrative medicine, and patient and public engagement. Ava is involved in a number of research studies and trials looking into the diagnosis, management and outcomes of encephalitis and is a Senior Honorary Fellow in the Department of Clinical Infection, Microbiology and Immunology, University of Liverpool, UK

### Assoc Prof Kiran Thakur

#### Columbia University Irving Medical Center



Dr Kiran Thakur is the Herbert Irving Associate Professor of Neurology at Columbia University Irving Medical Center – New York Presbyterian Hospital. She leads the Program in Neuroinfectious Diseases at Columbia University Irving Medical Center. After graduating from the Harvard Neurology Residency Training Program, Dr Thakur completed post-doctoral fellowship training in neuroinfectious diseases and neuroimmunology at the Johns Hopkins Hospital. She has a specialised interest in viral encephalitis, and emerging pathogens, and collaborates with scientists globally on the surveillance, diagnosis, and management of neuroinfectious diseases. In addition to her scientific efforts, Dr Thakur serves as a neurology consultant for the World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control and the Pan American Health Organization.

### Assist Prof Sarah Flanagan Wesley

#### Columbia University Irving Medical Center



Dr Sarah Flanagan Wesley is a neurologist specialising in autoimmune diseases of the nervous system at Columbia University. After finishing her neuroimmunology training at Yale, Dr Wesley built a clinic at Yale with a high volume of rare conditions, in particular various forms of immune-mediated encephalitis. She brought this expertise with her to Columbia University in 2020 when she joined faculty. In addition to managing many patients with encephalitis, she conducts clinical research and trials in autoimmune encephalitis and is working towards improved awareness and treatment outcomes.

### Dr Molly Wilson-Murphy

#### Boston Children's Hospital



Dr. Molly Wilson-Murphy is a pediatric neurologist at Boston Children's Hospital. Her areas of clinical specialty include infectious and inflammatory conditions in children including encephalitis and meningoencephalitis. She has a particular interest in neurological complications of vaccine preventable diseases; arboviral encephalitis including Powassan virus, West Nile, and Eastern Equine Encephalitis; as well as infection triggered encephalopathy syndromes (ITES) such as influenza associated encephalitis and encephalopathy (IAE) and acute necrotizing encephalopathy (ANE); tick-borne infections including Lyme neuroborreliosis; and post-acute sequelae of COVID-19 (PASC). She has experience in medical education and mentorship and is the associate program director of the Boston Children's Hospital Child Neurology training program.

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Our England and Wales Charity No. is 1087843 and our Charitable Company No. is 04189027.  
Our Charity No. in Scotland is SC048210.

Encephalitis International is a Named Fund member of the Chapel & York US Foundation, Inc.  
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**Encephalitis**  
International  
The brain inflammation non-profit

# Meet the Speakers



## Jim Cooper

### Infectious encephalitis lived experience

Jim Cooper's career included 20 plus years with the Port Authority of NY & NJ and as a result of the illness, retired last February. His last ten years with the Agency was to create and operate the cyber security unit - the tip of the spear for cyber security and related investigations for 5 airports, a railroad, several ports, tunnels and bridges and a bus terminal. Jim is married for 30 plus years with 4 children and has enjoyed sailing, rock climbing and camping with the family.



## Assist Prof Akin Beckley

### Columbia University Irving Medical Centre

Dr Akin Beckley, MD is a physiatrist with a specialty in caring for patients with gait impairments. He completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada then attended medical school at the University of Connecticut. He completed physical medicine and rehabilitation training at Thomas Jefferson University Hospitals where he served as chief resident. Dr. Beckley is the Associate Residency Program Director in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. He is also the medical director of the inpatient rehabilitation unit at New York-Presbyterian Hospital and the director of vascular and amputee rehabilitation for the Department of Rehabilitation and Regenerative Medicine. Dr. Beckley is currently on faculty of Columbia University Irving Medical Center and New York-Presbyterian Hospital as Assistant Professor of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.



## Dr Claude Steriade

### NYU Langone's Comprehensive Epilepsy Center

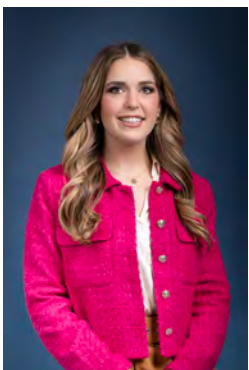
Claude Steriade is an Associate Professor of Neurology at the NYU Comprehensive Epilepsy Center. She has a clinical and research interest in the interface between neuroinflammation and epilepsy. She participates in a multidisciplinary clinic focused on the subacute to chronic management of autoimmune encephalitis with psychiatry and rehab medicine specialists. She conducts research on neuroimaging markers of glial activation and BBB dysfunction in patients with autoimmune causes of seizures and autoimmune encephalitis. She is also involved in multiple multicenter studies of autoimmune encephalitis and neural autoantibodies in the context of seizure disorders, including clinical trials of novel treatments for autoimmune encephalitis.



## Prof Steven Kushner

### New York-Presbyterian / Columbia University Irving Medical Center

Prof Kushner is Professor of Psychiatry and Co-Director of Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) Center for Precision Psychiatry & Mental Health. He trained at University of California and undertook his residency at New York-Presbyterian / Columbia University / New York State Psychiatric Institute. His research is focused on elucidating the genetic and pathophysiological mechanisms underlying psychiatric and related neurodevelopmental disorders, through a combination of clinical, translational, and fundamental neuroscience approaches, in an effort to improve the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of severe mental illness.



## Rachael Muggleton

### Autoimmune encephalitis lived experience

My name is Rachael Muggleton, and I am a 25-year-old third-year encephalitis survivor. I consider myself an insatiable thinker, shaped by the power of compassionate medicine and deeply committed to advocating for those who are underserved, underrepresented, and under researched. In my early twenties, while pursuing my undergraduate education at Penn State University and enjoying a vibrant social life, my world was abruptly transformed by a diagnosis of Anti-NMDAR autoimmune encephalitis. I was placed in a medically induced coma for 4.5 months to allow my brain time to heal while physicians searched for answers. Through the unpredictable journey of recovery, I discovered a profound sense of purpose. I rebuilt my body and mind from the ground up and became a passionate advocate for the unique needs of individuals facing similar challenges. Today, as a medical student, I carry with me not only pride in how far I have come but also a deep appreciation for the healing power of empathetic, patient-centred care. I am honoured to share my story as a testament to how compassionate medicine transforms lives and to affirm that in life, we are never denied—only redirected."



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