



Kannapolis couple join COPD study with hopes of improving health for future generations

Husband, wife become 299th and 300th participants in Duke's MURDOCK COPD Study at North Carolina Research Campus

KANNAPOLIS, N.C.—Dec. 18, 2017—The first time Joseph Griggs met Nellie Griggs, he made a bold prediction.

“You’re going to be my wife,” Joseph told Nellie in August 2001 while they chatted in a New York City park.

Nellie wasn’t so sure.

“I told him he was crazy,” she said, as the couple reminisced in their Kannapolis home. “But after that, we became inseparable.”

The New York natives moved to Kannapolis in 2002 and were married at the Cabarrus County Courthouse. Fifteen years later, they remain nearly inseparable and share a common goal: They hope to improve the health of future generations by joining the MURDOCK COPD Study, managed by the Duke Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) in Kannapolis at the North Carolina Research Campus.



Nellie and Joseph Griggs are the 299th and 300th participants in the MURDOCK COPD Study, managed by Duke CTSI at the North Carolina Research Campus.

Nellie recently became the 299th participant in the study, and Joseph enrolled the next day as No. 300. The Duke CTSI team aims to enroll 850 people in the study and follow their health for



Managed by  Duke Clinical & Translational Science Institute

up to five years. To qualify, participants do not need to have COPD, which stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, but they must have smoked.

Duke researchers are studying the severity of smoking-related symptoms in participants and following the progression of their lung function to better understand the disease. The study could help doctors provide better care for their patients and more effective treatments in the community setting, according to Scott Palmer, M.D., director of respiratory research for the Duke Clinical Research Institute (DCRI) and principal investigator for the study.



The New York natives say they feel good about contributing to clinical research and hope they can help future generations.

“I think it’s wonderful,” Joseph said. “It will help people later on if researchers can understand COPD. I want them to know more about what’s going on, because I have it. If we can help them by joining the study, then we feel like we’ve done our part.”

Chronic lower respiratory diseases, which include COPD, are the third-leading cause of death in the United States.

Participation in the study by people like Nellie and Joseph, who started smoking as teenagers, provides a way for researchers to compare the current system for classifying the stages of COPD to disease development and progression in a real-world setting.

“Much of what we have learned about COPD to date has been gathered from research done in large academic medical centers,” said Jamie Todd, M.D., assistant professor of medicine in the DCRI and co-principal investigator of the study. “But for this study, we have the unique opportunity to work with the MURDOCK Study to better understand the progression and management of COPD in a community setting.”

Joseph, 57, coughs and tires easily now, but growing up in Brooklyn, he played baseball and football, drove a truck, and worked as a mechanic. A former boxer and chef, Joseph had to quit sports and his job when he suffered a stroke in 2010.



Nellie, 51, grew up in the Bronx with 10 siblings and worked for the City of New York in a variety of jobs, including helping people who received public assistance find work. She suffered kidney failure last year and receives dialysis three days a week while awaiting a kidney transplant.

“I would like to give her one of mine,” Joseph said, “but I am not a match.”

Nellie and Joseph moved back to New York a few years ago to care for their ailing mothers. They returned to Kannapolis in 2016, drawn by the mild winters and lower cost of living. Without a car, they call a cab or have friends shuttle them to health care appointments. For errands, Nellie walks and Joseph uses a motorized scooter.

Sixteen years after Joseph asked Nellie if he could buy her a Pepsi on a hot summer day, the couple count their blessings daily, despite their many health problems. They are intrigued by the transformation of Kannapolis into a research hub, and proud that they have contributed by joining the MURDOCK COPD Study.

“I like the idea of Kannapolis being about research,” Joseph said. “Helping sick people, that’s what we need to do.”

“We feel good about being in the study,” Nellie added. “We are blessed.”

Current or former smokers who are at least 40 years old could qualify to join the MURDOCK COPD Study. No geographic restrictions apply. During study follow-up, Duke CTSI in Kannapolis will contact participants every six months to measure changes to their health.

To learn more, call 704-250-5861, send an email to murdock-study@duke.edu or visit www.murdock-study.org/COPD. Participants will be offered compensation for each in-person visit.

The MURDOCK Study, Duke Clinical Research Institute, and Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals Inc. are collaborating on the study.

About Duke CTSI

The Duke Clinical and Translational Institute (CTSI) catalyzes and accelerates the innovation and translation of scientific discoveries into health benefits for patients and communities through collaborative research. Our NIH Clinical and Translational Science Award funding enables us to offer programs, project management and navigator services, and data sharing and informatics



resources that provide essential support to move ideas from the laboratory through early-phase clinical trials, and facilitate education for current and future translational medicine researchers. To learn more, visit www.ctsi.duke.edu.

About the MURDOCK Study and TransPop

The MURDOCK Study is part of the Duke CTSI Translational Population Health Research (TransPop) group in Kannapolis. The MURDOCK Study has more than 12,000 participants, and the TransPop group now manages a wide variety of research projects focusing on the exploration and discovery of biomarkers that will inform a deeper understanding of health and disease. MURDOCK stands for the Measurement to Understand Reclassification of Disease Of Cabarrus and Kannapolis. To learn more, visit www.murdock-study.org.

About Duke Clinical Research Institute

The Duke Clinical Research Institute (DCRI), part of the Duke University School of Medicine, is the largest academic research organization in the world. Its mission is to develop and share knowledge that improves the care of patients through innovative clinical research. The DCRI conducts groundbreaking multinational clinical trials, manages major national patient registries, and performs landmark outcomes research. DCRI research spans multiple disciplines, from pediatrics to geriatrics, primary care to subspecialty medicine, and genomics to proteomics. The DCRI's Respiratory Research program includes physicians with firsthand experience treating patients with diverse respiratory problems and expertise in conducting clinical and translational research in patient populations with respiratory disease. Faculty are drawn from the Duke University School of Medicine's Division of Pulmonary, Allergy, and Critical Care Medicine, consistently ranked among the top 10 programs in the United States. To learn more, visit www.dcri.org.