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Quelling Maladies Before They Start

By [MELANIE GRAYCE WEST](#)

Some donors fund disease education, others research and medical care. Michael Stoler and the Foundation for Medical Evaluation & Detection fund screening programs.

The New York-based foundation exclusively pays for the programs at medical institutions so that anyone can be tested for free or, in some cases, at a reduced cost. Programs have included screenings for skin cancer, strokes, HIV and colon cancer. "Nobody covers screenings," said Mr. Stoler, a managing director at private-equity firm Madison Realty Capital, and the president of New York Real Estate TV, LLC. "It's a terrible thing."



Michael Stoler

Such a funding focus leads Mr. Stoler, the president and chief executive of the foundation, to have frank conversations with friends and colleagues about the delicate, generally unpleasant, subject of screening. Like the time he emailed his contacts urging them to be screened for prostate cancer. It was an odd email to blast out, but it bore positive results: a colleague who heeded the call learned that he had prostate cancer. He later called Mr. Stoler to say thanks.

Mr. Stoler set up the Foundation for Medical Evaluation & Detection more than a decade ago with the help of 11 friends. Together, they donate and fundraise for programs, handle the management of the foundation without employees and coordinate directly to establish screening programs with institutions in the tri-state region.

The foundation's latest focus is on Jewish genetic diseases. Recently, it committed \$90,000 to support the Program for Jewish Genetic Health, a joint effort of Yeshiva University and Albert Einstein College of Medicine. The gift follows a commitment made last year.

The screenings offered by the Program for Jewish Genetic Health cover spinal muscular atrophy and 18 genetic diseases that have common mutations in the Ashkenazi Jewish population. Some affect the lifespan of a child. The screenings include counseling that allows patients to understand the options available for family planning.

For many people, this type of screening isn't fully covered by insurance, or is cost prohibitive. "If you can find out that you have a potential risk, you don't have to go through a serious condition," said Mr. Stoler.

Generally, there is good awareness within the Jewish community about genetic testing, and other organizations also provide screening for some genetic diseases. The major issue for medical institutions and patients, Mr. Stoler said, is cost and pre-conception access to tests. That's evolving as more local labs are approved to do such testing and as the Program for Jewish Genetic Health works out new partnerships.

Results from recent tests performed by the program and paid for by the Foundation for Medical Evaluation & Detection showed that a third of 132 people screened were carriers of a Jewish genetic disease. When both parents are carriers of the same genetic disease, they have a 25% chance of passing it along to their child.

Said Mr. Stoler, "When you hear that, you get more serious and you want to help out."

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