

Hawking to promote Israeli ALS research

Move marks recognition of real chance for breakthrough by local scientists

• By JUDY SIEGEL

Theoretical physicist Prof. Stephen Hawking, who has just completed a week-long visit to Israel, has volunteered to promote research into amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (motor neurone, or Lou Gehrig's disease) – from which he has suffered for 43 years – by the Israel ALS Research Association.

IsrALS announced on Monday that the Cambridge University scientist has agreed to take part in its global campaign.

The organization was founded three years ago by Haifa businessman David Cohen, who also has ALS. IsrALS focuses on research by Israeli scientists and the belief that they are capable of finding a cure. A number of high profile senior researchers have accepted the challenge and the fund-raising initiatives have begun. The ALS Project aims to raise awareness of the disease, encourage interest in the scientific community and raise money

for research. The organization's third Israel Medical Conference on ALS Research will be held on Thursday at Tel Aviv's Dan Panorama Hotel.

The move marks Hawking's recognition of a real opportunity for a scientific breakthrough by Israeli researchers. During his visit, he acknowledged Israel's lead in developing neurodegenerative drugs and in embryonic stem cell research, which could benefit ALS sufferers.

IsrALS chief executive officer Nir Tsooran said, "We are very excited about Stephen Hawking's involvement in ALS and are confident that with his help, we will be able to promote the ALS Project to both domestic and international audiences. Although some 150 Israelis people die every year from the disease, it is largely neglected by pharmaceutical companies and the scientific community. Our aim is to change that, and with Stephen Hawking's help, we believe we can achieve our goal."



THEORETICAL PHYSICIST Prof. Stephen Hawking is photographed after a speech. (Ariel Jerolimski/The Jerusalem Post)