Michael Charness, M.D.

Dr. Charness is Professor of Neurology and Faculty Associate Dean at Harvard Medical School and Professor of Neurology and Associate Dean at Boston University School of Medicine. He was Chief of Neurology at the VA Boston Healthcare System from 1996 until 2003. Since 2003, he has served as Chief of Staff at the VA Boston Healthcare System, where he is responsible for clinical care, education, and research. Dr. Charness earned his B.Sc. in Psychology from McGill University and his M.D. from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. He served as resident in Internal Medicine at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and resident and Chief Resident in Neurology and postdoctoral fellow in Neuroscience at UCSF.

Dr. Charness has worked in the field of alcohol research for the past 30 years, focusing most recently on the effects of alcohol on the developing nervous system. His laboratory was the first to suggest that the L1 neural cell adhesion molecule might be a target of alcohol in the pathogenesis of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. Alcohol inhibits L1-mediated cell adhesion by interacting with an alcohol binding pocket in the L1 extracellular domain. Furthermore, drugs that block the effects of alcohol on L1 also prevent teratogenesis in mice. This work holds the promise of preventing or reversing alcohol toxicity in the developing nervous system. Dr. Charness is the scientific director of the Collaborative Initiative on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (CIFASD), an NIAAA-funded, international initiative to improve the diagnosis and treatment of FASD. He served as president of Research Society on Alcoholism (RSA), on the Board of Directors of ISBRA, and as a member of the National Advisory Council for NIAAA. He received the Frank Seixas Award from RSA, a MERIT Award from NIAAA, a lifetime achievement award from the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and the Henry Rosett Award from the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Study Group of RSA.