haring a tradition of philanthropy isn’t something that only happens in families or across generations. The spirit also passes between colleagues: people who, throughout their careers, have pursued similar missions. And when that happens, as with Drs. Daniel Wallace and Michael Weisman, the result can carry forward the achievements of a lifetime—or two—and pave the way for transformative medicine in the future.

A passion for rheumatology launched these two doctors on their personal career paths, and Cedars-Sinai brought them together. Dr. Wallace completed his residency at the Medical Center and served as clinical chief of Rheumatology from 1991 to 1996 under the direction of James Klinenberg, MD. Now a professor of Medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, Wallace maintains his clinical practice at Cedars-Sinai. Dr. Weisman was drawn to Cedars-Sinai 10 years ago by the opportunity to join a leading-edge team that included Dr. Wallace. Today, he holds Dr. Klinenberg’s former post: Director of the Division of Rheumatology.

The autoimmune illnesses Drs. Wallace and Weisman treat and study are as debilitating as they are widespread. Rheumatoid arthritis alone, which causes painful inflammation of the joints, affects some 1.3 million adults in the United States. An estimated 1.5 million Americans—90 percent of them women—are afflicted with lupus. The spinal condition ankylosing spondylitis, which can lead to excruciating fusion of the vertebrae, affects almost as many people as rheumatoid arthritis and can be just as devastating.

Both of these committed physicians have dedicated their careers to advancing the approach to treating autoimmune diseases through research and clinical trials. “Drugs have become extremely efficient at treating rheumatoid arthritis, but we still understand very little about what causes the disease,” Dr. Weisman says. “I’m interested in identifying rheumatoid arthritis before it starts, so we can prevent it.”

His latest research looks at the environmental and genetic factors that may predispose a person to the condition. His collaborative spirit, curiosity, and notable expertise at designing clinical trials, recruiting patients, and measuring outcomes have also made him a key player in studies related to lupus and ankylosing spondylitis.

Some of that collaboration taps the expertise of Dr. Wallace. “At any given time, we may have 30 projects going on, including several with National Institutes of Health grants, and 10 to 15 clinical trials,” says Dr. Wallace, who focuses on the treatment of lupus. “The big news is that, after 50 years, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is about to approve the first drug ever for lupus.”
In 2005, Dr. Weisman submitted guidelines to the FDA outlining the steps toward such a drug. Dr. Wallace played a lead role in two of some 20 subsequent trials and was an important participant in others. This fall, that work will reap benefits as the drug belimumab—which reduces lupus-related inflammation by blocking a protein that stimulates B cells—reaches the marketplace.

Independently and collaboratively, Drs. Wallace and Weisman have helped transform medicine’s approach to rheumatoid diseases. Both doctors care passionately about seeing that progress continue, even beyond their lifetimes. So when the opportunity arose to consider a planned gift, Dr. Weisman decided to set an example: He designated funds from his estate toward endowing a chair in rheumatoid diseases at Cedars-Sinai.

“I wanted to attract talented, young physicians to the field of rheumatology by providing a source of funding for their work,” Dr. Weisman says. “And I wanted to demonstrate to my colleagues the seriousness and the impact of a legacy.”

Dr. Wallace shares Dr. Weisman’s belief in the power of legacy, and the two set a challenge: If 10 colleagues would each pledge $100,000, together they could create an endowed fund benefiting their division. The campaign to bring in additional partners continues.

Dr. Wallace’s planned gift also has personal meaning. His father, Dr. Leon Wallace, was a cardiologist at Cedars-Sinai from 1947 until his retirement in 2006; he passed away in 2009. “I remember rounding with him at the old Cedars of Lebanon in the 1950s,” he says. “That’s when I became interested in medicine.” Dr. Wallace wanted to memorialize his father and thank the Medical Center for the important role it played in launching their careers. “I am the beneficiary of a Cedars-Sinai education that goes back to the 1960s. I know how formative it can be,” he says. “I also understand the need to attract and support the brightest minds in the field.”

Setting an example for other departments at Cedars-Sinai, Drs. Weisman and Wallace are creating a legacy that perpetuates the fruits of their own collaborative work. Because it will support talented young physician-researchers in their field, that legacy exemplifies “caring” in the most profound and visionary sense: Their generosity will fuel innovation and enlightened, next-generation approaches to treating or preventing rheumatoid diseases.

“Our gifts are about the future, and the future of rheumatology is disease prevention,” says Dr. Weisman. “Of course, that will put my colleagues and me out of business,” he adds with a smile. “But that’s all right. I’ll be able to do all those things—like fishing or refinishing furniture—that I just don’t have time for now.”