



# Multiple sclerosis information

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## for health and social care professionals

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## A multidisciplinary approach to MS care

Current and emerging disease modifying drug therapies impact on the course of MS by targeting immune responses and slowing down the course of MS. They are an investment for the long-term future but do not address the impact of symptoms felt.

Expert and effective symptom management remains key to optimising quality of life for those living with MS<sup>1</sup>. Lesions characteristic of MS can occur anywhere within the central nervous system resulting in a wide range of diverse symptoms that may present in many combinations, with variable intensity and are often difficult to describe. No two people with MS have exactly the same symptoms.

It is important to consider that most people with MS may experience only a few of these symptoms and that the intensity and frequency can vary; either at any one time or throughout the duration of the condition. Symptoms can also be influenced by a number of mediators and moderators such as core body temperature, stress, concomitant illness, infection, pressures sores and general health and wellbeing.

It is essential to discriminate between cause, effect and association in MS. Understanding the relationships between primary symptoms, secondary effects and additional factors will ensure effective symptom management.

Secondary complications will worsen primary symptoms. Take pressure sores as an example. They may be the consequence of untreated continence problems rather than a symptom of MS. They will then become a focus for worsening spasm if spasticity is present as a primary problem. Less clear perhaps is pain, which may be either a primary symptom deriving from damage to the central nervous system or a secondary symptom such as the effect of bad posture.

Symptoms can be visible and invisible; they may present an obvious problem or be misattributed, even missed. The less overt and invisible such as depression, fatigue, cognitive problems or sexual dysfunction are often not considered, assessed or

identified and yet impact on quality of life and capacity to remain in employment as profoundly as some more apparent symptoms such as impaired mobility.

The diversity and range of symptoms often necessitates many health and social care professionals being involved in the care of a person with MS. A study reported up to 60 workers from different sources visiting the home of a person with MS<sup>2</sup>. NICE guidelines<sup>3</sup> state that 'when several healthcare professionals are involved with a person with MS they should work together with the person and his or her family as a team towards common agreed goals and using an agreed common therapeutic approach.'

MS can result in very complex multidisciplinary needs, often with subtle problems remaining unrecognised and misunderstood. Successful outcomes need true multidisciplinary working with shared goals. GP, neurologist, radiologist, rehabilitationist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, psychologist, counsellor, orthotist, dietitian, nurse, continence adviser, speech and language therapist, pain specialist, social worker, complementary therapist - all can have a role to play in helping the person with MS remain fully engaged with daily life and able to manage effectively.

Successful management of one symptom may require the input from several different professionals and goals that encompass whole lived experience not just a disparate collection of symptoms.

The MS specialist health professional is pivotal to collaborative and coordinated care and support for people with MS. "The role involves acting as a consultant and educational resource for staff striving towards greater awareness and knowledge of MS in the health and social arena"<sup>4</sup>. The MS specialist can support people with MS to maximise their self-management skills.

Provision of specialist MS services remains inequitable and for some lack of access to an MS specialist team may result in not being able to obtain the right advice at the right time with resultant poor outcomes. People living with MS may not always know what is available, useful, and accessible; often they are young and have a life yet to be lived. The MS Trust and other voluntary organisations can provide information to people with MS and signpost to local services available.

## A multidisciplinary approach to MS care

### References

1. Thompson AJ, Toosy AT, Ciccarelli O. Pharmacological management of symptoms in multiple sclerosis: current approaches and future directions. *Lancet Neurol* 2010;9(12):1182-99.
2. Thompson A, Johnston S, Harrison J, et al. Service delivery in multiple sclerosis: the need for co-ordinated community care. *MS Management* 1997;4(1):11-8.
3. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. Multiple sclerosis - management of multiple sclerosis in primary and secondary care. NICE Clinical Guideline 8. London: NICE; 2003.
4. MS Trust, RCN, UKMSSNA, TiMS. A competency framework for MS specialist services. Letchworth: MS Trust; 2009.

### MS Trust resources

Way Ahead – newsletter for health and social care professionals who support people with MS



Health professional resources  
[www.mstrust.org.uk/professionals](http://www.mstrust.org.uk/professionals)

Map of services  
[www.mstrust.org.uk/map](http://www.mstrust.org.uk/map)

We hope you find the information in this book helpful. If you would like to speak with someone about any aspect of MS, contact the MS Trust information team and they will help find answers to your questions.

This book has been provided free by the Multiple Sclerosis Trust, a small UK charity which works to improve the lives of people affected by MS. We rely on donations, fundraising and gifts in wills to be able to fund our services and are extremely grateful for every donation received, no matter what size.

## MS Trust information service

### Helping you find the information you need

The MS Trust offers a wide range of publications, including a newsletter for health and social care professionals Way Ahead and the MS Information Update, which provides an ongoing update on research and developments in MS management.

For a full list of MS Trust publications, to sign up for Way Ahead and much more visit our website at [www.mstrust.org.uk](http://www.mstrust.org.uk)



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