



This month's newsletter focuses on working with clients with Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

What you will learn:

- Definition of MS and the associated conditions
- Symptoms of MS; Facts about MS
- The aides role in working with clients with MS

## What is MS?

MS is a chronic, unpredictable neurological disease that affects the central nervous system.

- It is an unpredictable and variable disease- (different in each person)
- The disease is often progressive- can worsen as time goes on
- Diagnosis usually occurs between the ages of 20-40, when people are starting careers and families
- MS is different from muscular dystrophy (MD). Although MD has some symptoms in common with MS—such as weakness and problems with walking—MD affects the muscles directly while MS affects the central nervous system.
- MS is not contagious and is not directly inherited.
- Most people with MS have a normal or near-normal life expectancy.
- The majority of people with MS do not become severely disabled.
- There are now FDA-approved medications that have been shown to reduce the number of relapses and "modify" or slow down the underlying course of MS.

With MS- Different people are likely to experience very different symptoms:

- Overwhelming fatigue
- Spasticity
- Loss of Balance
- Visual Impairment
- Bowel/Bladder Dysfunction
- Weakness/numbness/pain
- Swallowing/Speech Difficulty
- Paralysis
- Depression/Impaired Cognition

## Aide's Role in working with a client with MS:

Be knowledgeable of MS and its symptoms, such as:

- **Heat negatively affects MS and its symptoms – use fans, air conditioning, icy drinks to cool down the body. Encourage client to stay inside during the hottest part of the day.**
- **People may have problems with their thinking such as short-term memory loss or slowness in responding; repeat questions as needed and write down important tasks or conversation highlights.**
- **Muscle tightness can cause pain and stiffness; talk with your supervisor about the appropriate exercises that can be prescribed by a physical therapist to help relieve this**

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## **Aide's Role Continued:**

- If your client is dealing with bladder issues, encourage limiting alcohol/caffeinated drinks that can irritate the bladder
- Assist the client in managing overwhelming fatigue by taking short rest breaks, and other energy saving techniques
- Understand that the disease is variable – what someone can do today, they might not be able to do tomorrow
- Be sensitive to the losses and sadness that people with MS experience
- Understand that people with MS want to be as independent as they possibly can

### **Other Facts about MS**

MS can cause blurred vision, loss of balance, poor coordination, slurred speech, tremors, numbness, extreme fatigue, problems with memory and concentration, paralysis, and blindness and more. These problems may be permanent or may come and go.



Although there is no cure for MS at the present time, management of the disease includes strategies to treat acute relapses (also called *attacks* or episodes), slow disease activity, manage individual symptoms, promote function and independence, and provide emotional support.

Approximately 400,000 Americans have MS, and every week about 200 people are diagnosed. Worldwide, MS affects about 2.5 million people.

#### **Who Gets MS?**

- **Twice as many women as men get MS**
- **More common in Caucasians**

**Understand that the disease is variable – what someone can do today, they might not be able to do tomorrow; Be sensitive to the losses and sadness that people with MS experience; Understand that people with MS want to be as independent as they possibly can.**

Resources for this newsletter: The National MS Society- Eastern NC- Kaye Gooch; The National MS society; To learn more about MS- please visit the National MS society webpage at: <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/index.aspx>