

Setting The Record Straight On Multiple Sclerosis

(NAPSA)—Understanding multiple sclerosis (MS) can be overwhelming for a newly diagnosed patient, and with so many MS resources available, especially online, it is even more confusing for patients to know where to turn to find the most accurate, up-to-date information to help them navigate the disease. Further, with so much ongoing research, information about MS is continually evolving, adding to the challenge of finding the most current and accurate content.

When someone is diagnosed with MS, both the person living with MS and their families want answers to understand how this disease is going to impact them, but the vast amount of information available makes it difficult to know where to turn.

“With so many online resources available, many of which have out-of-date, incorrect information, and people’s inclination to search online to understand a disease, I find myself spending a significant amount of time re-educating my patients about MS,” said Christina Caon, BSN, MSN, NP-C, an advanced-level nurse practitioner and assistant director of Clinical Research at the Wayne State University Multiple Sclerosis Center.

To set the record straight, Caon addresses several common MS questions and misperceptions.

What is MS?

MS is currently thought to be an autoimmune disease of the central nervous system, which is made up of the brain, spinal cord and the optic nerves. It occurs when the body’s immune cells get confused and begin to attack the protective sheath (called myelin), which surrounds our nerve fibers and helps them transmit electrical impulses throughout the body. When the myelin is attacked, it’s damaged, and this interferes with the nerves’ ability to transmit messages between the brain and other parts of the body. These disruptions can



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result in many different physical and cognitive problems.

The exact cause of MS remains a mystery, though most agree it likely results from a genetic predisposition in combination with either a virus or environmental factor a person was exposed to.

What is the prevalence of MS?

Each week, 200 people are diagnosed with MS, adding to the approximately 2.5 million people living with MS worldwide. Most people are diagnosed with relapsing MS in their 20s or 30s, and women are up to three times more likely than men to develop MS.

What are some of the most common MS symptoms?

Everyone with MS has a different disease course and symptoms. The symptoms differ in severity and fluctuate over time. They may include blurred vision or loss of vision, loss of balance, poor coordination, slurred speech, tremors, numbness and tingling, extreme fatigue, diminished mobility of the arms or legs, problems with memory and concentration, and bladder and bowel dysfunction.

Is MS treatable?

There is no cure for MS but there are effective treatments available to modify the disease by reducing the frequency of MS exac-

erations and, in some cases, slowing the progression of physical disability. It is important to take one of these medications. The treatment of a patient’s day-to-day symptoms is also important. This can be done by using medications and rehabilitative techniques, which can improve the patient’s quality of life.

Can women with MS have children?

Many women with MS can and do have children. The chance of their child having MS is only 2 percent.

Does a diagnosis of MS mean a shorter life span?

Absolutely not. Statistics show that most people with MS have a normal or near-normal life expectancy.

Is it true that people with MS cannot work or go to school?

A diagnosis of MS does not mean someone cannot work or go to school. Because of available treatments, symptom management strategies and ways to make an environment more accessible and comfortable, many people with MS can continue with these activities.

How can I learn more about MS?

While it can be difficult to know where to go for accurate information on MS, there are many reliable resources available, specifically online. One of these resources is MS Atrium, an online portal with comprehensive, up-to-date and unbiased MS information supported by Genzyme, a Sanofi company. The content is created in consultation with a team of leading experts dedicated to researching, studying and treating MS. In addition to providing this valuable information, MS Atrium also serves as a guide to accessing other reliable MS resources, helping people educate themselves on the disease.

Visit MS Atrium at www.MSAtrium.com.