



Multiple Sclerosis Nursing in 2004: A Global Perspective

Meeting Highlights

The Multiple Sclerosis Trust's Seventh Annual Conference took place from November 2 through November 4, 2003 in Harrogate, United Kingdom. Approximately 350 health care professionals attended the three-day meeting, making this the MS Trust's largest-ever conference. The theme of the conference was "Maintaining the Momentum."

The opening session covered political issues relevant to MS, including the National Service Framework for long-term conditions, the role of patients in their own care, and the launch of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence MS Management Guidelines. According to Sarah Crombie, the MS Trust's Education Officer, "the caliber of presentation engendered a high level of interaction and discussion following the opening session."

A theme that emerged throughout the conference was the opportunity for health professionals to identify "champions" within their area of work and to identify leaders who can help "maintain the momentum" by improving services—whether they are people with MS, neurologists, local members of Parliament, or multidisciplinary colleagues, said

Ms. Crombie. "Significant progress has been made over the last decade in the management of MS in the UK but it is evident that there is still work to be done," she added.

Other highlights of the conference included a presentation about the pressures that general practitioners and other members of the primary care team in the UK are under and why MS poses so many challenges for them; research presentations from therapists and nurses on the latest findings from UK clinical practice; a presentation on the current understanding of MS and new therapeutic rationales; and seminar sessions on pregnancy and parenthood, depression, cognition, fatigue, pain, managing caseloads, legal and moral issues, genetics, spasticity management, the new care standards, and nutrition.

Since 1995, the MS Trust has played an important role in the education and support of nurses, therapists, and health care professionals in the UK who work with people with MS. In particular, the MS Trust has pioneered the role of the MS specialist nurse in the UK and education programs to support their development.

For copies of the abstract volume for the 2003 conference please e-mail info@mstrust.org.uk or call +44-14-6247-6700.

For information about the upcoming Eighth MS Trust conference, see listings on page 12.

How to Manage Your Caseload

Advice From Lanarkshire's Only MS Nurse Specialist

Nurses who work with MS patients in MS centers have a difficult enough time trying to manage their time, resources, and caseloads. This can be an even greater problem for nurses in areas where there are no dedicated MS care units.

During a workshop at the last MS Trust Conference in Harrogate, UK, Anne McCaffrey, BSc, SPQ (Neuroscience), an MS specialist nurse, discussed some of the strategies that she uses to integrate MS services throughout Lanarkshire, Scotland as the region's sole MS nurse.

Many variables affecting MS nurses' caseloads include factors beyond their control, noted Ms. McCaffrey, such as the demographics of the region they serve, whether care exists in an acute or primary setting, and the financial and practical resources available. However, she also touched on issues over which individual nurses do have control, such as self-education and time management.

“Resources may be restricted for various reasons,” said Ms. McCaffrey. “Funding may not be available to employ health care professionals in MS specialist posts; there may not be adequate resources to allow health care providers to do their jobs to the best of their ability; or MS specialist posts may be set up without having been properly thought through or without the long-term financial implications of these posts having been identified.”

The Lanarkshire Experience

Historically, MS patients in Lanarkshire have had to travel outside the county to go to dedicated MS clinics and to receive inpatient and outpatient neurorehabilitation services. However, it has been recognized that service to MS patients should be improved and, as a first step, a specialist nurse post has been developed in the region. In addition, Lanarkshire has a small Young Physically Disabled Team—a team that provides rehabilitation for neurologically impaired adults in the community. At present, this program provides services mainly to South Lanarkshire, noted Ms. McCaffrey, but the eventual goal is to develop a service that covers the entire region.

Even though Lanarkshire does not provide integrated MS service, “good pockets of care do exist,” Ms. McCaffrey pointed out. “Lanarkshire has some areas where care is more expertly given due to such things as the health care professionals’ knowledge of MS and the equipment available. This, unfortunately, can result in the quality of care not being uniform throughout the region.” Again, further development of services for MS patients will address this issue, she added.

The Ayrshire Experience

Ms. McCaffrey talked about her earlier experience in the region of Ayrshire, Scotland and discussed the benefits of a full multidisciplinary MS team with dedicated services. The Ayrshire example serves not only to contrast the lack of an organized MS support team at Lanarkshire, but also to present a realistic model toward which Lanarkshire and other places like it can strive.

TABLE

LANARKSHIRE DEMOGRAPHICS	
Population	552,190
Estimated number of people with MS	1,138
MS nurse referrals	571

In Ayrshire, there is a specialized 19-bed inpatient neurorehabilitation unit for people with neurologic conditions, suitable for patients with MS exacerbations. It is led by a consultant in neurorehabilitation medicine. A dedicated senior house officer and on-call medics from other areas of the hospital provide general medical care, she explained. Nursing leadership is provided by a registered nurse who is ward manager and there are staff members providing 24-hour nursing care. “During my time there I had specialist input for people with MS on admission to the unit and as outpatients,” added Ms. McCaffrey.

“The unit is interdisciplinary. Patients are individually assessed and have input from professionals allied to medicine (PAMs) as need dictates. Upon discharge, patients may have outpatient follow-up if required and are reviewed regularly.” With inpatient and outpatient clinics, there are health care professionals who are dedicated to looking after patients with MS. This enables continuity of care. Each of the PAMs reviews his/her patients independently from the consultant. Patient progress is then discussed in team meetings, she explained.

On The Road to Efficient Caseload Management

“One of the first steps of effective caseload management is asking for the resources you need,” stressed Ms. McCaffrey. Also, nurses should develop patient assessment documentation and create a database of referrals received. Keeping detailed and accurate records is very important, she added. “Meet regularly with managers and be assertive,” she said. “Produce monthly figures of your data—referrals received and made, patients assessed, help calls taken, and so on.”

Since the link between primary and acute care interface may be weak, Ms. McCaffrey advised MS nurses to benchmark with other health organizations that may already provide services for people with MS. “Also, nurses should liaise with voluntary and statutory bodies that have knowledge in MS, such as the MS Trust or the MS Society, or any other community service that may be relevant to the care of someone with MS,” she added.

Ms. McCaffrey concluded by emphasizing the need for MS nurses to take care of themselves and “not get overwhelmed with clinical input. It can be easy for the clinical part of our jobs to overtake other aspects. It is important that we take care of our educational needs by attending relevant courses and conferences. This helps us both personally and professionally.”

MSX

—Rosalee L. Blumer

Special Section: Nursing Resources on the Web

Sorting through countless sites devoted to nursing on the Internet can be both confusing and time-consuming. To help MS nurses navigate this sea of information, the editors of MS Exchange have compiled the following list of some useful MS nursing-oriented sites.

Achoo Gateway to Healthcare

www.achoo.com

One of the greatest hurdles for the health care sector is the sheer volume of information available through the Internet. Achoo acts as a starting point for those interested in researching health care information on the Web.

Allnurses.com

www.allnurses.com

This site provides the latest nursing news, nursing job listings, a health information library, and ongoing online discussions with other nurses.

American Association of Neuroscience Nurses (AANN)

www.aann.org

This is the association Web site of the AANN, which is the certifying organization for neuroscience nurses. The site offers a newsletter, annual meeting information, and certification information.

American Nurses Association (ANA)

www.nursingworld.org

This is the official Web site of the ANA, which represents the 2.6 million registered nurses in the US through its state organizations.

Association of Rehabilitation Nurses (ARN)

www.rehabnurse.org

An association Web site offering information whose focus is improving patients' functional outcomes. The ARN is the certifying organization for rehabilitation nurses and offers a variety of continuing education articles, conference information, certification information, and more.

Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC)

www.mscares.org

CMSC is a multidisciplinary organization that serves as a network for health care professionals who specialize in the care of patients with MS. The site contains articles, discussion forums, multimedia presentations, and more.

International Journal of MS Care

www.mscares.com

The journal is published quarterly both online and in print and serves as the official publication of the CMSC. It features peer-reviewed clinical and original research articles of interest to MS care providers on topics such as nursing care, rehabilitation, and psychological/psychosocial care.

International Organization of Multiple Sclerosis Nurses (IOMSN)

www.iomsn.org

The IOMSN is the first and only international organization focused solely on the needs and goals of professional nurses who care for people with MS. IOMSN supports nurses in their continuing effort to offer hope through mentoring, educating, networking, and sharing.

NursingCenter

www.nursingcenter.com

For a small fee, the NursingCenter offers nurses online access to journal content from more than 30 top nursing journals. The site's continuing education section provides hundreds of articles and online testing.

RNCentral™

www.rncentral.com

RNCentral is a Web site where nurses share their experiences, support one another, and find information important to nursing and patient care.

RNWeb

http://rn.pdr.net/be_core/r/index.jsp

This site serves registered nurses in various specialties, primarily those working in hospitals. Continuing education material is updated regularly.

Nurse Web

www.nursewebsearch.com

A nursing resource and directory on this site provides links to nursing-related categories such as care plans, drug databases, education, and employment.

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The IOMSN is the only organization dedicated to the education of MS nurses around the world. If you wish to join the IOMSN, you can access it on the World Wide Web at www.iomsn.org, or contact the organization at:

IOMSN

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