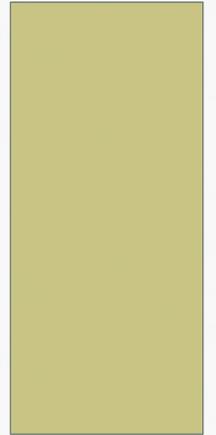


AGING WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

MARIJEAN BUHSE, RN, PHD, NP-C
STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY



BACKGROUND

- About 90% of people with MS in their 20's today can expect to live at least until their 70's. (1)
- This means they will live with MS for about 50 years
- As of 2004, estimates of 9% of MS patients were over age 65 (2). That number has grown and may be closer to 25% (3)

CHANGES IN NORMAL AGING

- Decreased vision
- Increased cognitive issues – such as a slower learning rate, less short term memory
- Reduced energy
- Increased bladder problems – especially for women
- Slowed GI system leading to constipation
- More likely to have co-morbidities

CHANGES IN PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES

- As the person ages, there may have fewer friends, significant others their own age
- May have to deal with death of spouse, friends, children
- May have limited finances
- May have insurance issues

OLDER PEOPLE WITH MS

- Most will have limited mobility (4)
- Many will have cognitive impairment and may need assistance from a caregiver (2)
- On top of that, most will have the same changes in aging and psychosocial issues
- Depression is not uncommon (5)
- Cognitive impairment is not uncommon (4)

HEALTHY AGING WITH MS

- Study by Ploughman (2012) ⁽⁶⁾
- Foundational Factors – Resilience, Mental/Cognitive Health, Financial Flexibility, Social Support
- Critical Proximal Factors – Work/Social Engagement, Effective & Accessible Healthcare, Healthy Lifestyle Habits, Maintaining Independence at Home

MOBILITY ISSUES

- Encourage any kind of exercise
- Any kind of rehabilitation will be helpful
- Suggest joining groups such as yoga, swimming, stretching
- Encourage use of assistive devices as needed

COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

- Shown to decrease quality of life
- Shown to increase need for caregiver assistance
- Talk with patient about changes in cognition
- Not all is age related
- Include caregiver in conversations
- Discuss reminder tactics that can be useful

DEPRESSION/ ANXIETY

- Not uncommon in elderly in general and more common in older MS patients
- Do not be afraid to treat but be aware of all medications they are on – including OTC's
- Because of decreased renal function and slowing of GI system, meds can have a different impact
- When prescribing – start low go slow

SOCIALIZATION

- Many people with MS live alone
- Decreased socialization can lead to depression
- Socialization is key to maintaining quality of life
- If cannot get out of house, connect via telephone/computer to support groups, MS chat rooms
- If still employed, encourage staying employed

FINANCIAL ISSUES

- Speak with local chapter of NMSS to see what kind of counseling they have
- Contact MSAAs to see what they offer patients
- Insurance can be a big problem. If you order a new medication, try to make it the most effective med at the least cost.
- Generic drug programs at Walmart etc
- Patient assistance through drug companies

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE HABITS

- Assist patient to stay healthy
- Maintain health through regular check-ups including dental and gyn
- Discuss food habits and diet. Most elders have high cholesterol/hypertension which can impact their MS

SUMMARY

- Many people with MS will live a normal lifespan
- As they age, their needs will increase
- Living with MS does not mean they cannot live well
- Quality of life can be increased if patient has a healthy lifestyle

REFERENCES

- 1. DiLorenzo, T. (2006) Aging with Multiple Sclerosis. Clinical Bulletin from the professional Resource Center of the National MS Society.
- 2. Minden, S., Frankel, D. Hadden, L., Srinath, K., & Perloff, J. (2004). Disability in elderly people with multiple sclerosis: An analysis of baseline data from the Sonya Slifka Longitudinal Multiple Sclerosis Study. *NeuroRehabilitation*, 19 (1):55-67
- 3. Narcoms Database
- 4. Stern, M. (2005). Aging with Multiple Sclerosis. *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America*. 16:219-234.
- 5. Garcia, J. & Finlayson, M. (2005). Mental health and mental health service use among people age 45+ with multiple sclerosis. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health* 20 (2), 9-22
- 6. Ploughman, M., et al (2012). Factors influencing healthy aging with multiple sclerosis: a qualitative study. *Disability & Rehabilitation*. 34 (1): 26-33