

Hala Darwish, PhD, APN, RN, FAAN



Short Professional Biography:

Dr. Hala Darwish is an associate professor at the School of Nursing and the Department of Neurology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. She is a certified nurse in Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Dr. Darwish has ongoing research projects investigating cognitive and affective functions in MS. She has received NIH training and individual research grants and has presented her work at national and international forums. Additionally, Dr. Darwish is a member of the Michigan Neuroscience Institute and is the first Neuroscience scholar within the School of Nursing. She is also a member of the Nursing Honor Society - Sigma Theta Tau and a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing. Furthermore, she has authored several research papers on the topic.

Brief Description of Your Project:

Title: Bringing the Outdoors In: Virtual Nature Walks for Depression in Individuals with Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Depression significantly impacts up to 50% of individuals with progressive Multiple Sclerosis (MS), often limiting their quality of life and independence. This nurse-led study at the University of Michigan, supported by the Apple Investigator Support Program, the Explore POV app, and the IOMSN, is testing the benefits of virtual reality (VR) nature experiences using the Explore POV app as an accessible, at-home supplement to standard depression treatment.

Participants engage with immersive nature scenes via the app and VR headsets to potentially reduce depressive and anxiety symptoms. This is especially beneficial for those with mobility or accessibility challenges who can't easily experience traditional outdoor nature therapies.

The pilot trial involves 40 individuals over 21 weeks, evaluating feasibility, depression, anxiety, stress, and user experiences to inform future MS care.