Feel Your Best

Recognizing and Managing Depression
Meet the Speakers

- Ann Borsellino – person living with MS
- Karen Peterson – Ann’s carepartner
- Rosalind Kalb, PhD – clinical psychologist and VP, Healthcare Information & Resources
Agenda for Today

• Introducing the Society’s depression initiative
• Reviewing what we know about depression
• Recognizing the signs and symptoms
• Understanding the impact of depression on oneself and others
• Getting a diagnosis
• Getting treatment
• Feeling like yourself again
Depression Initiative

- Across multiple channels, people with MS identify depression as one of their most challenging symptoms
- Meeting of researchers, clinicians, people affected by MS and Society staff held in June, 2015
- White paper reporting the results of that meeting posted online and available here
- Society response:
  - promoting awareness (people affected by MS and healthcare providers)
  - developing a research agenda
  - enhancing access to mental health services
  - Implementing strategies to prevent suicide
What do we know about depression in MS

• Charcot first alerted us to depression in MS in 1877 – and then we ignored him
• More than 50% of people with MS will experience a major depressive episode
• The number of people who will experience less severe depressive symptoms is much higher
And what else?

- Depression...
  - is one of the *most common and most treatable* symptoms of MS
  - appears to have multiple causes – neurologic, immune, psychosocial
  - can be affected by medications – e.g., steroids
What are the signs and symptoms of a Major Depression?

- Low mood
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep or waking in the morning
- Physical and cognitive slowing or agitation
- Loss of energy/tiredness
- Feelings of worthlessness/excessive guilt
- Difficulties with thinking, concentration, decision-making
- Recurrent thoughts of suicide and dying

*One of the first two + at least 5 of the other symptoms most of the time for two weeks*
Why is MS challenging to diagnose in people with MS?

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Why else?

- Emotional issues still carry a stigma
- Doctors may not ask; you may not tell
- Depression in MS sometimes appears as irritability
- Depressive symptoms may be difficult to distinguish from healthy grieving
What is healthy grieving?
What is the impact of depression?

- As Ann and Karen have described, people who are depressed may...
  - not function as well cognitively
  - have difficulty taking care of themselves or others
  - lose time from work
  - be very irritable
  - be difficult to live with
And most importantly…

- Depression makes other symptoms (fatigue, pain, cognition…) feel worse
- Depression can be life-threatening
  - Depression is the primary risk factor for suicide
  - Suicide is several times more common in MS than in the general population
Questions to Ask Yourselves

During the past two weeks:

1. Have you often felt down, depressed or hopeless
2. Have you had little interest or pleasure in doing things?

If you answered ‘yes’ to either or both of these questions, you may be experiencing depression.

Talk with your doctor or call 800-344-4867 for a referral to a mental health professional in your area.
How should depression be treated?

Recommendations for people with MS and partners:

• Talk therapy (e.g., cognitive behavior therapy) + antidepressant medication is the treatment of choice

• Exercise has been shown to improve mood

Support group participation is not sufficient for treating significant depression
Take-away messages

• Many people (people with MS and carepartners) are living with more distress and discomfort than they need to
• Depression is one of the most common and treatable symptoms of MS
• The challenges of MS are difficult enough to navigate without the heavy weight of depression – so don’t hesitate to discuss mood issues with your healthcare provider
Recommended Resources

- Depression white paper
- What We Know about Diet, Exercise and Mood
- www.nationalMSsociety.org/Depression
- Depression and MS (brochure)
- MS and Your Emotions (brochure)
- Contact an MS Navigator
  - Tel: 800-344-4867
  - Email: ContactUsNMSS@nmss.org