The Impact of Cognitive Changes in the Peer Relationship

An Educational Opportunity for Connection Program Volunteers

National Multiple Sclerosis Society
The Impact of Cognitive Changes in the Peer Relationship

**CALL ONE:**
Date/Time: Tuesday, March 4 from 7-8 p.m. ET  
(6-7 p.m. CT, 5-6 p.m. MT, 4-5 p.m. PT)
Phone Number: (877) 715-5282
Conference ID: 33559506

**CALL TWO:**
Date/Time: Wednesday, March 5 from 1-2 p.m. ET  
(12-1 p.m. CT, 11 a.m.-12 p.m. MT, 10-11 a.m. PT)
Phone Number: (877) 715-5282
Conference ID: 33560209
How Common? – How Severe?

Severity of Cognitive Changes in Multiple Sclerosis

- None: 50%
- Mild: 40%
- Moderate to severe: 10%
Relationship to Other Disease Factors

- Cognitive changes correlate with certain MRI findings.
  - Total lesion area
  - Brain atrophy
- Cognitive changes can occur at any time – even as a first symptom – but are more common later.
- Cognitive changes can occur with any disease course, but are slightly more common in progressive MS.
- Being in an exacerbation is a risk factor for cognitive changes.
- Depression can worsen cognition symptoms.
A Word about Cognition and Fatigue

• *Physical fatigue* has less impact on cognitive performance than people think.
• *Cognitive fatigue* refers to a decline in cognitive performance following cognitively challenging tasks.
• Cognitive fatigue can occur even in the absence of physical fatigue.
Functions Affected in MS

- Memory – acquisition and retrieval of new information
- Attention & concentration – “working memory”
- Speed of information processing
- Executive functioning
- Visual/spatial organization
- Verbal fluency – word finding
Functions Not Affected in MS

- General intellect
- Long-term memory
- Long-term (remote) memory
- Recognition memory
- Conversation skill
- Reading comprehension
Recognizing Memory Problems

- Taking longer – or more repetitions – to learn new information
- Forgetting recent conversations, TV shows, story plots
- Forgetting appointments, social engagements
- Losing track of medication schedules
- Forgetting to do planned activities or tasks
- Losing or misplacing things
- Forgetting names, phone numbers, etc.
Recognizing Impaired Attention and Concentration

• Having difficulty staying focused
• Becoming easily distracted
• Challenged by divided attention tasks (e.g., listening to a family member talk while cooking)
• Experiencing “brain fatigue” when trying to concentrate on challenging intellectual tasks
• Having poor recall because of inattention when information was being learned
Recognizing Slowed Information Processing

- Quality of work is the same but output is much less
- Difficulty keeping up with the flow of conversation – particularly in a group
- Difficulty responding quickly when a lot of information is being presented
- Trouble dealing with tasks having a time element, e.g., deadlines, card games, word games
- Difficulty processing information coming from several different sources simultaneously (e.g., while driving, at a large party)
Recognizing Problems with Executive Functions

- Trouble with “multi-tasking”
- Difficulty performing jobs requiring analytic skills
- Difficulty following complex arguments or explanations; missing the point in a conversation
- Trouble with tasks requiring multiple steps (e.g., project at work; cooking a meal; paying the bills)
- Being too literal or concrete (e.g., missing the point of a joke)
- Needing increased direction on the job because of difficulty in setting priorities, organizing time, and meeting deadlines
Psychosocial Impact of Cognitive Changes

Cognitive changes:
• Threaten sense of self, self-esteem and self-confidence
• Affect interactions with others
  — Alter communication patterns
  — Impact other people’s perceptions
  — Interfere with role performance
  — Affect the balance in a relationship
  — Interfere with treatment planning and adherence
A Word about Pseudobulbar Affect (PBA)

- Episodes of uncontrollable laughing and/or crying that are out of proportion or unrelated to emotional state
- Differs from mood swings
- Tends to be related to more advanced MS, but not always
- Tends to be related cognitive changes
- Treatment options include:
  - Nuedexta® -- specifically approved to treat PBA
  - amitriptyline (Elavil® and SSRI antidepressants e.g., Prozac®)
Resources


• Mood and Cognition Issues Educational Recording: http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Resources-Support/Find-Support/Connect-with-Peers-One-on-One/For-Connection-Program-Volunteers (scroll to end of telelearnings)

• Upcoming North American Education Program (NAEP) toolkit will be centered on Cognition and Mood
Questions?

• To listen to this educational opportunity again or access any of the other Resources and Support materials for Connection Program Volunteers, please go to www.nationalmssociety.org/connectionprograms

• Click on “Resources and Support for Connection Program Volunteers”