

Choosing the Right Healthcare Providers

GENERAL INFORMATION





Carole, diagnosed in 2005

National MS Society Referral-List Process

The National MS Society routinely responds to requests for information about health-care providers by giving you a list of at least three professionals. The professionals on our lists have an interest in caring for people with MS and have been reviewed by knowledgeable staff. Additionally, the neurologists we list have also been reviewed by your local chapter's Clinical Advisory Committee.

The neurologists (physicians who specialize in nervous system disorders) on our lists have affirmed that they:

- are board certified or board eligible
- are licensed by the state
- have one or more hospital affiliations
- have malpractice coverage
- will prescribe the MS disease-modifying drugs when appropriate

It is important to know that this is not a formal “credentialing” or certification process and that the information about each healthcare provider is self-reported. No one on the list is a Society employee. However, some serve on our volunteer committees or are staff at facilities that have formal affiliations with the Society. The Society provides information about a number of qualified individuals in order to support your ability to make a personal choice.

In some areas the Society may also be able to identify sites that have been designated as centers for comprehensive care for people with MS. These centers may be particularly appropriate for you, to coordinate care, if you have multiple problems associated with your MS.

The job of being a good consumer is up to you.

1. Before you call for an appointment

- Review your health insurance plan to be clear about what your plan will or won't cover, especially if you choose to go out of network.
- Consider transportation issues. Traveling a long way to see the right healthcare provider is often an intelligent investment. However, it's wise to think through the costs in money, fatigue, and stress on family members.

2. When you call

The receptionist will probably be busy. You're likely to have just a few minutes to ask questions before you make (or don't make) an appointment.

These questions may help your decision-making:

- Approximately how many other people with MS does this provider see in a year?
- Is my insurance accepted? What happens if I lose my insurance?
- If you are currently on a disease-modifying drug, does this neurologist prescribe that particular medicine?
- If I have to go to the hospital, in which hospital does the neurologist have admitting privileges?

- Does the office assist with the completion of disability paperwork? If so, is there a charge?
- Does the office complete preauthorization forms for medications or tests? If so, is there a charge?
- If I should need a safe-driving evaluation, care for bladder infections or emotional problems, can this provider refer me to others with that expertise?
- Who answers questions on the telephone? Will I get a call back?
- Can we communicate by e-mail? Is there a charge?
- Is the office accessible? Can scooters or wheelchairs get in easily? Where is the parking lot? Are the exam tables usable by patients with mobility limitations?
- Are there opportunities to participate in MS clinical trials [if this is of interest to you]?
- What do I need to bring to my first appointment? [For example, a list of your medications, recent lab reports, MRI scans, and so on.]
- Does the neurologist prefer that you bring MRI scan copies as films or on a CD?

3. At your first visit

These indicators may be important:

- If you brought your spouse, partner, or close friend, does the provider welcome your companion?
- What happens when you ask for an explanation of a medical term or an unfamiliar concept?
- Does the provider allow you to tape record or take notes? Does she or he write anything down for you?
- Do you feel comfortable with this provider?

You may want to ask:

- If the primary professional is not available, who helps me?
- Who do I see on routine visits?
- Has the staff had any training specific to MS?
- Can I have time to talk with the office nurse?
- What are the provider's feelings about complementary or alternative therapies?
- How are prescription refills handled?
- Where are infusions done, if needed?

The bottom line

Always remember that you are the consumer. If you have trouble understanding the provider, or feel rushed or disrespected, trust your instincts. Consider seeing another provider. Your healthcare providers should be trusted partners in your efforts to manage this complex, often frustrating disease.

We welcome your questions and comments. Call us at 1-800-FIGHT-MS (1-800-344-4867).

* Developed under the direction of the Society's National Council of Clinical Advisory Committee Chairs, Dr. Rock Heyman, Chair.



Judy, diagnosed in 1982

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SURE IT DOESN'T.
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