A new survey has highlighted concern among multiple sclerosis (MS) specialists — including nurses — that some patients with MS are not engaging with specialist services. The research — Multiple Sclerosis Clinician Survey of 100 Specialist MS Nurses and Neurologists — found that 93% of healthcare professionals with expertise in MS believe that there are people with the condition who are missing out on access to new medicines, symptom control and holistic services, all of which can be offered by the MS team.

Previous research by the MS Trust found that nearly one-fifth of people with MS had not seen an MS specialist nurse or a neurologist in the past year, thereby missing out on the comprehensive annual review recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). In addition to this, many people with MS are not covered by an MS specialist nurse caseload.

FACTS AND FIGURES

MS is not a static disease and it can progress. Progression can lead to the development or increased severity of a number of symptoms and, in severe cases, patients can develop disabilities including speech problems and cognitive issues such as difficulty with thinking and memory.

The progression of MS can be unpredictable and can vary from individual-to-individual, therefore monitoring is important. Thanks to the development of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology, we are now able to monitor signs of disease progression that would have otherwise remained ‘unseen’.

‘Practice and community nurses have a key role to play in identifying MS patients and connecting them with specialist services.’

This kind of technology has enabled MS experts to monitor the disease much more closely, allowing for interventions that try to slow deterioration. A recent report published by the MS Society — Time to Act: A Consensus on Early Treatment — demonstrates consensus among leading MS clinicians and researchers that early treatment is key in improving long-term health and wellbeing, slowing down irreversible damage, and reducing relapses.

To help address this issue, a new initiative — the 1MSg campaign — has been developed with clinical experts (funded by Biogen, a company specialising in therapies for serious neurological, autoimmune and rare diseases). The campaign aims to highlight the benefits of regular and quality engagement with MS specialists to ensure people are making informed decisions about their disease management based on the latest information. The one message at the heart of the campaign is: ‘Take control; know your choices.’

KEEPING IN CONTACT

It is really important that everyone with MS sees a specialist on a regular basis. Having access to the MS team can make a real difference. We can check that people with MS are managing well and, if not, can provide additional support. Contact with a specialist can also help patients make decisions about what is best for them. An individual’s MS changes all the time, and so monitoring and regular review can help to ensure that it is being appropriately managed.

Nurse-led

Practice and community nurses have a key role to play in identifying MS patients and connecting them with specialist services. Nurses can identify people with MS who they may be seeing for an unrelated issue such as a blood or smear test, and ask them about their condition. If the patient requests, the nurse can then signpost them to specialist services in their area.

The 1MSg campaign will launch with an educational website where people with MS, and those close to them, will have access to a range of information including video advice from leading specialists. In addition, educational materials will be delivered to GP surgeries and MS centres across the country to help spread the campaign message.

To learn more about the 1MSg campaign visit: www.1msg.co.uk

MS awareness week

MS awareness week runs from 25 April to 1 May, 2016 and aims to ensure that everyone affected by MS can access the specialist care that works for them. Find out more at: www.mstrust.org.uk
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