

# Choosing the Right Healthcare Providers

GENERAL INFORMATION



**National  
Multiple Sclerosis  
Society**

MS is a life-long disease, which makes it critical for you to feel comfortable with your MS healthcare providers and work in partnership with them. As you choose a provider, it is important to think about what is most important to you; for example, is it important to you to know how long the provider has been treating MS, or how many people with MS he or she has treated? Is distance to the office important? Do you want to see a physician who is also engaged in MS research or clinical trials? Do you need to ask about interpreter services available at the office? Is it important to you that your provider is open to discussing alternative and complementary therapies? Giving some thought to your essential criteria will help you choose a provider who is right for you.

## National MS Society Referral Process

The National MS Society routinely responds to referral requests by providing a list of at least three healthcare providers. The professionals on our lists have an interest in caring for people with MS and have been screened by knowledgeable staff. Additionally, all of the neurologists, as well as the Society's *Partners in MS Care*, have been vetted by your local chapter's Clinical Advisory Committee.

The *Partners in MS Care* program recognizes and supports quality MS care. The program involves healthcare professionals in the areas of neurology, mental health and rehabilitation, as well as sites that provide multi-disciplinary, comprehensive MS care. *Centers for Comprehensive MS Care* have demonstrated that they can address, in a coordinated way, the complex issues that many people with MS face. Sometimes the care is provided in one location, but more often through a referral network.

All healthcare professionals who are recognized as *Partners in MS Care* demonstrate knowledge and experience in MS care; have a special interest in treating people living with multiple sclerosis, and work closely with the National MS Society.

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

- are board certified or board eligible in neurology
- are licensed by the state
- have malpractice coverage
- will prescribe the MS disease-modifying therapies when appropriate

It is important to know that we do not have a formal credentialing process. Information about each healthcare provider

is self-reported. No one on the referral list is a Society employee; however, some serve on our volunteer committees. The Society provides information about at least three qualified individuals in order to support your ability to make a personal choice.

*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 whether the provider is in or out of your insurance 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, time, and impact on other family members or friends.

## 2. When you call

You may need to speak to someone other than the scheduler to get the answers to some of these questions.

The following 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 or change my insurance?

- How much time is allowed for an initial visit and a follow-up visit in this practice?
- If you are currently on a disease-modifying medication, does this neurologist prescribe that particular medicine?
- If I have to go to the hospital, at which hospital(s) does the neurologist have admitting privileges? If he or she doesn't have admitting privileges, is there communication between my doctor and the hospital about my care?
- Does the office complete preauthorization forms for medications or tests? If so, is there a charge?
- Does the office assist with insurance appeals, the completion of disability insurance forms, letters of medical necessity or other paperwork? If so, is there a charge?
- If I need a referral for other services, for example, care for bladder infections, help with emotional challenges, or a driving evaluation, can this provider refer me to others with the appropriate expertise?
- If I call with questions or concerns, who answers my 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? Are there accessible restrooms? Where is the parking lot? Are the exam tables usable by people with mobility limitations?

- Are there opportunities to participate in MS clinical trials?
- What do I need to bring to my first appointment? [For example, a list of my medications, recent lab reports, MRI scans, and so on.]
- Does the neurologist prefer that I bring previous MRI scan(s) as films or on a CD?

### 3. At your first visit

These indicators may be important:

- If you brought a family member or members, partner, or close friend, does the provider welcome your companion(s)?
- 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 he or she 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?
- Whom will 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?

- Are there other healthcare providers or services that you recommend I access (for example; rehabilitation therapies, vocational rehabilitation services, mental health or social services)?

## The bottom line

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

Many people find getting a second opinion valuable when they are making difficult treatment decisions. Your provider should be open to your seeking a second opinion. Remember that you can always contact an MS Navigator at the National MS Society for additional referrals if the need arises. We welcome your questions and comments. Call us at 1-800-344-4867. To find a *Partner in MS Care* on-line, go to: **[nationalMSsociety.org/partners](http://nationalMSsociety.org/partners)**.

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

**MS STOPS PEOPLE FROM MOVING.  
WE EXIST TO MAKE  
SURE IT DOESN'T.  
JOIN THE MOVEMENT®.**



**National  
Multiple Sclerosis  
Society**

**nationalMSsociety.org**

**For Information:**

**1 800 FIGHT MS (1 800 344 4867)**