

Men are from Mars: Building a Group for Male Relatives of People With Multiple Sclerosis in the West Sussex Area

Jo Johnson, Consultant Neuropsychologist, West Sussex; Lisa Black, MS Specialist Nurse, Sussex Partnership NHS Trust

INTRODUCTION

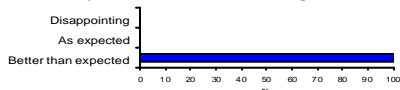
- Male partners of people with MS may not get sufficient support from professionals and organisations
- Given their age, male partners of people with MS are often working when healthcare professionals conduct home visits.
- Many females with MS had been telling professionals that their partners were not coping despite outward appearances.
- Some had stopped seeing friends; others were showing symptoms of depression, anxiety or overworking.
- Many of these women felt that their partner's distress was having a negative impact on the family unit.
- It was decided to explore the need for a group for men living with somebody with MS.

A STARTING POINT

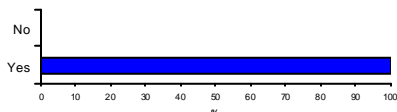
- Letters were sent out to the male partners inviting them to an information evening at a local hotel, away from the healthcare setting.
- After the initial meeting feedback questionnaires were completed (see Feedback from the initial meeting).
- The feedback demonstrated that there was a clear need for this group. We agreed to continue meeting on a bi-monthly basis

FEEDBACK FROM THE INITIAL MEETING

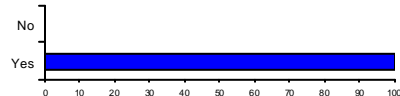
How have you found this evening?



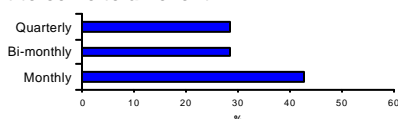
Would you recommend this event to others in the same position?



Would you be interested to attend further similar events?



If you would like more men's events, how frequently would you want to come to an event?



What has been most helpful about this evening?

- "Listening to other people's problems"
- "Meeting other people in the same position"
- "Just that it has happened – more please!"
- "Listening to others in a similar situation"
- "Sharing problems talking about it"
- "Meeting people who are in similar situations"
- "Meeting others with the same issues"

SETTING UP THE GROUP

- Attendance at the group is by invitation from one of the two convenors to exclude people with severe mental health difficulties or issues that would prevent somebody working within a group setting
- Funding for the venue (a local hotel) and a buffet meal for each meeting was offered by an appropriate pharmaceutical company

GROUP ACTIVITIES INCLUDE

- Topic based discussion e.g. cognition, fatigue, sex
- Invited speakers
- Unstructured discussions

MEN ARE FROM MARS

- Men are less likely to seek help for mental health issues
- Frequently, men do not have support systems that are as extensive as women's.
- Men who are depressed present with less obvious symptoms
- Men who do visit their GP with low mood tend to complain of physical symptoms
- Expressing emotion remains less acceptable for men
- Death by suicide is more common in men
- Men are more likely to adopt negative coping strategies such as inappropriate expression of anger or misusing alcohol
- Men are less likely to recognise feelings of stress or low mood

CONCLUSIONS

- We have welcomed at least one new member at every group so far
- Positive feedback not only from our members, but also from their partners
- We feel that purely on the basis of such consistent and ever increasing attendance that this is an unmet need that could usefully be explored within other health services


A photo of some of our members



FURTHER INFORMATION:

Jo Johnson: neuropsychology@talktalk.net

Lisa Black: Lisa.Black@westsussexpct.nhs.uk

Poster supported by Bayer Schering Pharma.  Bayer HealthCare
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We would like to thank all the members of the group for their consistent attendance and encouragement.