

The Evolution of an MS Specialist team. Breaking with tradition/embracing diversity.

Surrey MS Specialist Services Group

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Introduction

- Traditionally most MS Specialists come from a nursing background
- It is generally agreed that effective MS care needs to be multidisciplinary in nature
- In Surrey, a number of the MS Specialists working in a general MS specialist role do not have a nursing background
- In addition the funding background of the MS Specialists is diverse
- We outline the background of our MS Specialists and discuss the benefits of our group structure to patient services

Surrey MS Specialist Group

Individual	Background	Funding source
JP – hospital based	Nurse, General and Psychiatric	First 2 years pharmaceutical industry funding; thereafter NHS funding
JG – community based	Occupational therapist	Initially 50/50 MS Society and PCT Eventually fully funded by PCT
EG – community based	Physiotherapist	Initial funding from MS Society, now funded by PCT
VD – community based	Nurse	MS Society (until Sept. 09/Surrey PCT – 50/50)
EW – hospital based	Nurse	Initially funded by MS Society, now Central Surrey Health

Care Services for People with MS in Surrey

As a group we ensure these services are available for people in our region:

- Individual care plans for all patients
- Hospital consultations, domiciliary visits and community support
- Identification of those for whom Disease Modifying Therapy is appropriate and ongoing support
- Information transfer and educational support as required
- Service development to meet specific local needs

Working Practice

As a group we adopt the following working practice:

- Regular bi-monthly meetings allowing opinions from specialists from a different background to be obtained where appropriate
- Clinical supervision practised through the regular group meetings and other interactions.
- Contact by telephone or e-mail to obtain appropriate opinions from different specialists
- If considered necessary, specialists from a different professional background will visit a person to provide an opinion or recommendation
- Agree timely handover of cases where specialists share geographical responsibilities
- Patients (and their carers) are able to 'self-refer' to the MS specialist team

Benefits for People with MS in Surrey

We believe that the nature and structure of the group offers the following benefits for people with MS in our region:

- Continuity of care through access to a single MS Specialist
- Appropriate care as offered by a 'traditional' MS Specialist service

Standard of care expected from 'traditional' MS service and in addition

- Rapid, informal advice, where necessary, from a healthcare professional of a different background with specialist knowledge of MS

Case Study: Example of value of MS Specialist diverse Skill base.

Patient - 53 year old female, four children, living at home with care package (3 visits daily)

- Diagnosis** - secondary progressive MS with severe disability
- Problem** - concern from family about general health and long-term care issues
- Action** - joint visits by 2 MS specialists (1 nurse, 1 therapist)
- Outcome** - family advised and reassured by joint expertise, understood why wheelchair inappropriate, bed positioning improved, useful advice provided on general health issues, family began thinking about end of life issues.

Case Study: Example of value of MS Specialist diverse Skill base.

Patient - 50 year old male, married with 2 adult children

- Diagnosis** - primary progressive MS (1998)
- Problem** - difficulty accepting diagnosis (children and work colleagues unaware), symptoms of fatigue and weakness, poor general health
- Action** - multidisciplinary team referral: physiotherapist advice on reducing falls and movement problems, occupational therapists on fatigue management, nurses on general health issues
- Outcome** - more relaxed and managing MS better, children and work colleagues informed, healthier lifestyle, managing fatigue and pursuing leisure activities (golf), also becoming 'expert patient'.

Advantages to Surrey MS Specialists

We believe that the structure and nature of the group offers the following benefits to the MS Specialists that make up the group:

- Opportunities to learn from healthcare professionals from a different professional background
- Improved ability to communicate effectively with healthcare professionals from a different background
- Rapid and informal access to advice and help from different healthcare professionals

Funding Issues

Observation of the sources of funding for MS Specialists in Surrey suggests that:

- NHS cannot be relied on to provide all the funding necessary for MS Specialist support
- A wide range of funding sources has to be exploited to obtain MS Specialists
- This suggests that NHS is not convinced of the need for and value of MS Specialists

Discussion

On the basis of our experience in the MS Specialist group in Surrey we:

- Challenge the notion that MS Specialists have to come from a nursing background
- Believe that a more diverse multi skill mix of MS Specialists brings benefit to a locality
- Believe that a more diverse group of Clinical MS Specialists can broaden horizons
- Believe availability of MS Specialist from other health professional backgrounds helps an MS specialist team deliver care as required by NSF and NICE standards

Our experience shows that the role of an MS practitioner can be genuinely diverse; both in terms of where the funding may derive from as well as the healthcare skills that are appropriate

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