

Treatment and management of cognitive dysfunction in patients with multiple sclerosis

*** Recorded on October 8, 2020. *** [Listen to it here.](#)

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JOAN BANKS-SMITH:
00:05

This is Joan Bank Smith for Kessler Foundation's Fast Takes Rehabilitation Research that changes lives. Today I'm with Dr. John DeLuca, Senior Vice President of Research and Training at Kessler Foundation to talk about his latest peer-reviewed article: Treatment and Management of Cognitive Dysfunction in Patients with Multiple Sclerosis. This was published in the journal Nature Reviews Neurology. Funding sources are Kessler Foundation and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Dr. DeLuca, can you share with us the main takeaways of this publication?

JOHN DELUCA: 00:40

What we know now is that cognitive impairment is a major feature and a major problem with persons with multiple sclerosis, and it's taken 30 years to really understand this complex construct. And so while we have a good understanding of that now, what we need to do is to-- what are we going to do about this problem? And the purpose of this paper on treatment and management of cognitive dysfunction in MS was to outline the major approaches to what's being done today and what we really need to strive for. So this paper talks about three forms of interventions with cognitive impairment - that is cognitive rehabilitation, exercise, and medication management. Clearly, in this paper, it shows that the best evidence currently today is that behavioral treatments from cognitive rehabilitation shows very significant and positive and consistent evidence that we can improve cognitive dysfunction in everyday life in persons with MS through these rehabilitation techniques. I think it's a really, really important point. It doesn't mean that the research is finished on this. There's still plenty to learn. But that's clearly where the best evidence is in that patients deserve to get the treatment for cognitive rehabilitation if they have cognitive problems. And clinicians around the country and around the world need to be ready to do this. The second area that's described in this paper with respect to treatment of cognitive impairment is exercise. And this paper shows that the data on exercise is very preliminary. While it seems positive, it's not yet ready for primetime. There still needs to be a substantial amount of work before we can feel comfortable and say that, in fact, exercise can significantly improve cognitive impairment. There's a lot more work to do in terms of exercise such as what form of exercise, what's the duration, intensity of exercise, when should exercise start, et cetera, et cetera. There's a lot of promise for exercise. The third area is medication management, and this paper is pretty clear that the data on medication management is not yet ready for prime time. There's not any really good data to show that disease-modifying therapies or symptomatic therapies can and should be used routinely in helping persons with cognitive impairment. That's just not where the best data is. There's some data, but the best data - randomized controlled trials - are not showing really good findings. So the idea in this paper is that cognitive rehabilitation approaches have been shown to be effective, and persons in MS clinics and MS practice throughout the country and around the world should be then providing these therapies to patients with multiple sclerosis.

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BANKS-SMITH: 03:46

For more information about this study, check out the press release on our website, [Kessler Foundation.org](https://www.kesslerfoundation.org), or at [Nature Reviews neurology](https://www.nature.com/reviews/neurology). Links can be found in the program notes. Tuned into our podcast series lately? Join our listeners in 90 countries who enjoy learning about the work of Kessler Foundation. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Listen to us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Soundcloud, or wherever you get your podcasts.