

COVID-19 Impact Survey Yields Unexpected Findings for Individuals with Progressive MS - Ep11

*** Recorded on September 17, 2020. *** [Listen to it here.](#)

JOAN BANKS-SMITH:
00:04

This is Joan Banks-Smith for Kessler Foundation's Fast Takes. Rehabilitation Research that changes lives. Today, I'm with Dr. Nancy Chiaravalloti, Director of the Center for Neuropsychology and Neuroscience, and Center for Traumatic Brain Injury Research, to talk about her latest peer-reviewed article, Covid-19 Impact Survey Yields Unexpected Findings for Individuals with Progressive MS, which was published online August 19th 2020 in the Journal of Neurology. Funding sources for this study is the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. Can you share with us the main takeaways of this study?

NANCY
CHIARAVALLOTI: 00:42

This study was conducted across 11 centers across North America and Europe. It included 131 individuals with progressive MS. So what happened was during the pandemic, as study procedures shut down at each of the individual institutions, we had a number of research participants who were in the process of participating in our research study on exercise, and cognitive rehabilitation, and progressive MS that were home. We were touching base with these folks on a weekly basis just to check in to see how they were and to maintain contact. What we decided to do was administer a Covid impact survey to see how folks were faring at home. How they compared to their baseline assessments, to get a really objective evaluation of the impact of the pandemic on these individuals.

CHIARAVALLOTI: 01:40

And our findings were very interesting. Now, the most important part of the study is we had baseline measures of depression, anxiety, quality of life, and MS symptoms in each of these individuals. Then we were calling them back during the pandemic to re-evaluate them in each of those domains. So we were able to actually see the objective change in depression, anxiety, quality of life, and MS symptomatology in this group of patients. What we found was really interesting. We found that our respondents were faring quite well. In fact, there were no significant changes noted in anxiety, quality of life, or the impact of MS symptoms on daily life from their baseline evaluations to the evaluations that they completed during lockdown. So that was great news. We did find that there was a slight increase on depression scores during lockdown. But that didn't translate to more participants scoring above the threshold that we utilize for what we call clinically significant depression, or depression that would mandate treatment. It was just a slight increase. So that was actually a very interesting part of the finding, too.

CHIARAVALLOTI: 02:57

And the other thing that we found were there really were no significant relationships between disease duration or cognitive ability and any of these changes. So what we were seeing is everybody was really experiencing the pandemic pretty comparably. The one group that did show some difficulty was the group of patients that did report being infected with Covid. Those folks did show some changes in their MS symptomatology as well as some changes in depression. So that sub-sample that did actually contract Covid did have some difficulty. But those individuals that were home and under lockdown for the period of the pandemic, but were not infected with Covid, were actually faring quite well and were doing no worse than they were when

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we saw them at baseline. So that was really good news. And the field was pleased to hear that.

BANKS-SMITH: 03:49

What is the impact and next implications of this publication to the field?

CHIARAVALLOTI: 03:53

I think this was important to the field because based on the research that has been published to date, we expect to see greater depression, greater anxiety, poor quality of life in individuals without neurological impairment. And as a result, because individuals with neurological impairments such as multiple sclerosis often present with these symptoms as part of their disease, we then assume that the impact of the pandemic would be greater in those individuals on these symptoms. In fact, we show just the opposite. And that has a significant impact because the pandemic is not-- it's telling us that the pandemic is not differentially impairing the functioning in that population. And we can hopefully expect that they will proceed as we would have expected them to just given their diagnosis, rather than being significantly impacted by the pandemic.

CHIARAVALLOTI: 04:58

I think in regard to next steps and overall implications, this abstract is telling us that we can't really just make assumptions based on previous knowledge. That the pandemic was a unique experience for all of us, including those with neurological injuries or neurological illness such as MS. And we really have to evaluate each one of our cases individually to determine how the pandemic has impacted that individual, because there really is no one course of change that you would expect given that an individual is carrying the diagnosis.

BANKS-SMITH: 05:37

For more information about this study, check out the press release on our website, kesslerfoundation.org. The link is in the program notes. Be sure and subscribe to our SoundCloud channel, Kessler Foundation, for more research updates.