

Major role of social engagement in MS warrants new emphasis for clinical interventions - Ep41

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- LAUREN STROBER 00:10 [music] For me, and I think for the research world, it's also about addressing the social isolation and loneliness that we know is common among individuals with MS.
- BANKS-SMITH 00:20 That was Dr. Lauren Strober, Senior Research Scientist from our Center for Neuropsychology and Neuroscience Research. And this is Kessler Foundation's Fast Takes, research that changes lives. I'm your host, Joan Banks-Smith. In this episode, Dr. Lauren Strober talks about her peer-reviewed article, "Keeping it together: The role of social integration on health and psychological well-being among individuals with multiple sclerosis." This was published on March 24th, 2022 in the journal Health and Social Care in the Community. Funding source was the National Institute of Health, grant number K23HD069494 and the Robert E. Leet & Clara Guthrie Patterson Trust. Dr. Strober, can you share with us the main takeaways of this study?
- STROBER 01:14 This was an exciting study for me. I've been interested in the role of social connectedness and integration on health for some time, but this is not novel or new. This has been around for decades. We've known about the role of social activity on health. What sparked it for me was a 2010 meta-analysis by Julianne Holt-Lunstad among tens of thousands of people in which they found that social connectedness or one's social integration had a larger effect on one's health and mortality than the normal culprits we would think of, such as smoking, or exercise, or diet, or if someone got the flu vaccine. This really sparked my interest, and I've been wanting to see if these findings were [reputable?] in MS populations. So using a not as large of a data set, we had 183 individuals with MS that had been in a longitudinal study with us. But we were able to look at the role of social support and integration on their health and well-being. And what's interesting, we also included measures of psychological well-being, which is more of a positive psychology aspect, in particular because we know that health is not just defined as an absence of illness but also flourishing, or living well, or living a full life. So that was our measure of well-being. And what we found that while factors such as diet, and exercise, and cardiovascular risk did contribute to self-reported health, so did social integration across the board, and social support and social integration also played a role in mental health. And then finally, not surprising, we found that social integration and support were important for well-being across all aspects. So the main takeaway is that one's social engagement or activity can play a large role on health and one's well-being and should be considered when treating individuals with MS.
- BANKS-SMITH 03:01 What is the impact and next implications of this publication to the field?
- STROBER 03:06 Certainly, this would alert practitioners to the importance of asking about social activity. What are people doing with their time? Who do they spend their time with? What engagement do they have in their community? Do they go to church? Do they volunteer? Do they have intergenerational families at home? And what does their support network look like? That's the first thing. But really for me, and I think for the research world, it's also about kind of addressing the social isolation and loneliness that we know is common among individuals with MS. It's estimated that 50 to 70 percent of individuals with MS experience loneliness or social isolation, particularly

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older individuals. So it's really important for us to think about efforts and developing interventions and sort of policy to help make sure that people do not become isolated with MS and how we can best help that.

JOAN BANKS-SMITH
04:00

To learn more about Dr. Strober, the Center for Neuropsychology and Neuroscience Research, and her peer-reviewed article, links are 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. Be sure to subscribe to our SoundCloud channel, Kessler Foundation, for more research updates. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Listen to us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, SoundCloud, or wherever you get your podcasts. This podcast was recorded remotely on June 7th, 2022 and was edited and produced by Joan Banks-Smith, creative producer for Kessler Foundation. [music]

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