Evaluation of Provider Referrals to Additional Services for Management of Multiple Sclerosis Patients: Survey Results from the 2011 CMSC Meeting

Jennifer Ruiz1, Amy Neal1, Carolyn St. Andre1, Joan Page1, Matthew Farr1

1Mandell Center for Multiple Sclerosis Care and Neuroscience Research, Mount Sinai Rehabilitation Hospital, Hartford, CT, United States

Contact Information: Jennifer Ruiz: jruizc@stfranciscare.org; Matthew Farr: mfarr@stfranciscare.org

Background

Persons with multiple sclerosis (pwMS) require a multidisciplinary approach to manage the consequences of the disease [1] which often requires traveling to multiple locations to receive appropriate care. Evaluation of the use and accessibility of disciplines involved in treating multiple sclerosis (MS) is necessary to understand how to better provide comprehensive services. The creation of additional comprehensive care centers may greatly assist pwMS in managing their condition more easily and effectively.

Objectives

The objectives of this survey were to:
1. Assess which services pwMS are commonly referred to by a sample of MS professionals attending the 2011 Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC) annual conference in Montreal, Canada.
   a) Collect data on the location of referred services
   b) Determine which services MS professionals most desire for their patients, yet are currently unavailable to them
2. Compare the services available at a community based comprehensive care center, the Mandell Center for Multiple Sclerosis (Hartford, CT), to the results of a focus group of MS professionals attending the 2011 CMSC Conference in Montreal, Canada

Methods

A total of 1544 professionals attended the 2011 CMSC Annual Meeting. Attendees visiting the exhibit hall were invited to participate in a voluntary survey on services recommended to pwMS seen at their care location. Questions included type, location and availability of services. Additional data was collected on which services were desired yet currently unavailable and which sites participated in MS related research.

Results

A total of 131 (11.8%) meeting attendees completed the survey. The top three on-site referred services indicated were: neurology (53%), registered nurse (51%), and physical therapy (50%). The top three off-site referred services indicated were: exercise/wellness (30%), ophthalmology (25%), and physical therapy (25%). The top three services for additional services desired were additional rehabilitation programs (14%), case management (14%), and neuropsychology (14%). A total of 102 respondents indicated that MS related research, investigator initiated (61.7%) and/or industry sponsored (53.3%) research is conducted at their care location.

Discussion

Physical therapy, occupational therapy, and neurology are the most referred services by MS care providers with only 34% having all three disciplines on-site. Increased rehabilitation programs, case management and neuropsychology are additional services most desired by MS care providers. Further evaluation on availability, barriers to access and effectiveness of comprehensive care services for pwMS is necessary.

The attendees of the CMSC annual meeting may not be a representative sample and therefore the results of this survey should not be generalized to the population of MS care centers. However, the authors believe the attendees represent a focus group of educated, dedicated MS care providers whose opinions on referral services should be considered in the planning of larger studies and examining the makeup and access of comprehensive care.

The Mandell Center for Comprehensive Multiple Sclerosis Care and Neuroscience Research was developed in 2008 to offer comprehensive services in the Northeast. It is important to compare the services available at other comprehensive MS centers to determine if the Mandell MS Center is providing the appropriate level of comprehensive care. In an effort to expand comprehensive care at the Mandell MS Center, urology services (including urodynamics) were initiated in February 2012. Studies suggest that 60 percent of pwMS experience bladder dysfunction [2], making this an important fixture of comprehensive MS care centers.

In response to last year’s survey, case management was found to be one of the most requested services that is unavailable. In an attempt to advocate for the need of a case manager at the Mandell MS Center, we are focusing our 2012 CMSC survey on the utilization of case management.

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References