(S103) CHALLENGES IN THE TREATMENT OF MOBILITY LOSS AND WALKING IMPAIRMENT IN MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

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Background: Several research studies in recent years show that mobility loss and walking impairment are significant concerns among people living with multiple sclerosis (MS). Despite these findings, many people with MS lack essential information and guidance on how to discuss and address mobility loss with health-care providers. MS experts find that ongoing challenges related to the assessment and management of mobility loss can have a direct impact on outcomes and patient quality of life. Factors that can affect strategies to prevent and treat mobility in MS include prevalent gaps in patient education and understanding, variations in treatment team experience, challenges in efforts to coordinate care and share information across service areas, a shift away from treatment focus on symptom management, complex and imprecise terminology related to mobility issues, lack of accurate baseline assessments of mobility, inadequate incorporation of exercise into patient treatment regimens, and insufficient education about patient expectations related to treatment. Objectives: To identify specific actions that nurse practitioners, patients, and care partners should consider to improve the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mobility loss and walking impairment in people with MS. Methods: In June 2009 a panel of MS experts met to review current standards of care in the treatment of mobility loss in MS. Results: The panel of MS experts identified specific strategies in the assessment and treatment of mobility loss in MS, including exercise, physical therapy and rehabilitation, patient awareness, ongoing assessment of mobility and walking function, and a focus on symptom management. Conclusions: A decline in patient health associated with disease progression in MS can have a profound negative effect on mobility, quality of life, and independence. Lack of focus on symptom management can also increase the burden on care partners, who must expand essential support for patients. Members of the health-care team can take steps to address mobility loss in MS. Patients and care partners can also take a more active role in discussing and addressing mobility loss with a care team.

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