


## As MS Care Evolves, So Does Nurses' Purview

Halper J. The evolving role of the nurse in the treatment of multiple sclerosis. *J Neurosci Nurs.* 2009;41:E1-E13.

Complicated treatment regimens, advances in effective treatments, earlier diagnosis, and the necessity of providing comprehensive care have all contributed to the expanding role of MS advanced practice nurses. Considering the complexity of the disease, it makes sense that the roles of the people on the front lines of the battle against MS have become more sophisticated as well. In the clinical setting, nurses have always acted as educators, emotional supporters, advocates, and healthcare practitioners for patients and their caregivers. Now, however, nurses must be able to clearly convey complicated information about the long-term implications of an MS diagnosis and help patients and their families to establish realistic goals for disease treatment. The MS nurse fields many questions regarding the course of the disease, prognostic markers, and disease management—already-complex issues compounded by individual differences in disease progression, severity, and degree of cognitive impact. Because nurses may spend more time with patients than any other member of the healthcare team, patients frequently seek advice from them concerning treatment options and may ask for interpretations of research findings. It may also be necessary for a nurse to dispel a patient's misconceptions. Nurses are in an ideal position to empower patients to take charge of the management of their disease. In addition, the role of MS nurses has evolved to include supervising clinical trials, thereby contributing to outcome-based medicine.

Contact outside of the clinic with an MS nurse provides patients with additional support and has a positive impact on patient adherence to therapy. Several manufacturers of disease-modifying therapies for MS offer patient-assistance programs administered by nurses. Shared Solutions®, AVONEX® Nurse



### CLINICAL INSIGHTS

*As patients try to maximize the benefits that pharmacological options provide while minimizing the impact of the disease on their quality of life, MS nurses offer much-needed guidance and support.*

- ✎ *The involvement of nurses affiliated either with primary caregivers or with patient-assistance programs positively impacts patient adherence to therapy and consequently patient outcomes.*
- ✎ *Nurses provide one-on-one contact and immediate availability to patients; this has been shown to cause patients to disclose their relapses earlier to nurses, in comparison to physicians. Additionally, this support and prompt care can bolster patients' belief in the healthcare system.*
- ✎ *MS nurses have been pivotal in pain alleviation, dose titration, oversight of injection-site rotation, reduction of injection-site reactions, and prevention of infections.*
- ✎ *Data from patient-assistance programs have led to device adjustments or further education that can promote adherence, eg, autoinjectors with finer gauge needles and promotion of good injection-site technique.*
- ✎ *The nurses who participate in patient-assistance programs such as Shared Solutions, AVONEX Nurse Services, MS LifeLines, and BETAPLUS, are encouraged to become MS certified and to attend ongoing nurse education programs.*

Services, MS LifeLines®, and BETAPLUS® provide support through telephone or online portals (see Table, page 2). These programs also generate data regarding reasons for therapy changes or continuity, allow for the identification of gaps

in knowledge that need to be filled for patients, and identify which coverage has most benefitted patients. ■

*This summary was reviewed by  
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**Table. An Overview of Patient-Assistance Programs Currently Available for MS Patients.**

Company	Product	Nurse Program	Description	Services Offered	Web Links
Teva Neuroscience	Glatiramer acetate (Copaxone®)	Shared Solutions®	A voluntary, free program designed to help people with RRMS, their families, and their caregivers confront and manage the challenges of MS	A series of monthly teleconferences and seminars covering the latest issues and developments in MS  Comprehensive network of resources to help patients get started with therapy  Free telephone line 12 hours a day staffed by trained professionals  Educational seminars	<a href="http://www.copaxone.com/supportservices/">www.copaxone.com/supportservices/</a>  <a href="http://www.mswatch.com">www.mswatch.com</a>
Biogen Idec	IM IFN β-1a (Avonex®)	AVONEX® Nurse Services	Offers a mentor and advocate program, which provides training for experienced, long-term RRMS patients who want to be of assistance to other patients	Personal training on how to inject medication by a qualified nurse  Case manager, knowledgeable about MS and IM IFN β-1a therapy	<a href="http://www.avonex.com">www.avonex.com</a>
EMD Serono/Pfizer	SC IFN β-1a (Rebif®)	MS LifeLines®	A team of nurse educators who are dedicated to MS and available to provide education and in-home training to patients on SC IFN β-1a therapy	LifeLines Web site with up-to-date MS information  Manned telephone line for help and information	<a href="http://www.ms lifelines.com">www.ms lifelines.com</a>
Bayer Healthcare Pharmaceuticals	IFN β-1b (Betaseron®)	BETAPLUS®	Part of the BETA Nurse program, a personalized support program available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, that connects people with RRMS who are starting on IFN β-1b with a dedicated MS nurse specialist. Berlex (now Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals) created the BETA Nurse program in May 2002	Education on managing MS  In-home injection training  Assistance through BETAPLUS telephone calls  BETA Nurse real-time Web site  Reimbursement/Medicare Part D Advice	<a href="http://www.betanurses.com/patients/betaplus/beta_nurses/">www.betanurses.com/patients/betaplus/beta_nurses/</a>  <a href="http://www.betaseron.com/patients/betaplus/">www.betaseron.com/patients/betaplus/</a>

MS = multiple sclerosis; IFN = interferon; RRMS = relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis; IM = intramuscular; SC = subcutaneous; BETA = Betaseron Education, Training, and Assistance.

Adapted with permission from Halper J. The evolving role of the nurse in the treatment of multiple sclerosis. *J Neurosci Nurs.* 2009;41:E1-E13.