

Guest Editorial

Housing, community living, and employment issues for people with multiple sclerosis

Multiple sclerosis (MS) affects approximately 400,000 people in the United States, and an estimated 1.5 to 2.5 million people worldwide. Typically diagnosed in early to middle adulthood, MS is a chronic neurological condition that is associated with an array of physical and cognitive symptoms and is a leading non-traumatic cause of neurological disability in young adults. Living with MS and its symptoms can create significant disruption in psychosocial functioning, directly or indirectly affecting mobility and personal independence, community participation, employment, and financial status.

Although considerable research attention has been committed to better understanding the causes, effective treatments, and clinical sequelae of MS, relatively little research has explored the broad community living experiences and barriers faced by people living with MS. Yet housing and community living issues are a significant concern, and an important component of quality of life for many people with MS. Housing is a key aspect of independence and community integration, and it has long been an area of concern among persons with disabilities. For individuals with disabilities, finding housing that is affordable, safe, and accessible, as well as housing that provides access to employment opportunities and health and community services, can be particularly difficult. MS is frequently accompanied by symptoms that lead to mobility limitations that may affect one's ability to safely and independently function in the home and community, and, although many persons with MS currently rely on various forms of assistance, assistive technology, modifications and renovations, and community services that make their homes and communities more acces-

sible, many others need or could benefit from such resources.

Employment is perhaps the most important means by which people are able to ensure economic security, maintain their independence, and actively participate in their community. Among adults with MS, however, there is considerable evidence that employment retention is a significant problem. Although the majority of people with MS are employed at the time of diagnosis, only a relatively small percentage remain employed several years following their diagnosis. It is also the case that having a stable, safe, and accessible residence is likely to promote access to employment maintenance and expand employment opportunities, but this relationship has received relatively little attention from rehabilitation researchers.

The housing, community living, and employment needs and concerns of people with MS are broad and diverse, are interrelated in a complex fashion, and are generally poorly understood. There is a critical need for a more complete understanding of both the community living needs and challenges faced by persons with MS and the effectiveness of resources that exist to meet these needs. If rehabilitation professionals are to provide effective vocational, educational, community living, and advocacy interventions, we must strive to better understand the multiple factors that affect the lives of adults with MS.

The purpose of this special issue is to explore, from a variety of perspectives, the housing, community living, and employment issues of people with MS. We have assembled several articles that provide insights into the issues faced and the interventions that promote independence, employment retention, safe and

accessible housing, and quality of life. We are grateful to Robert Fraser, Kurt Johnson, Richard Roessler, Kathy Sheppard-Jones, Lynn Koch, Dent Gitchel, Eun-Jeong Lee, Samantha DeDios, Camille Simonette, Gloria Lee, Sarah Wohlford, Brittany Waletich, and

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