

# Benefits partnership awareness talk

## Notes to accompany slides

### Overview

The purpose of a benefits advice partnership awareness talk is to give the benefits adviser(s) an idea of some of the common symptoms of MS and how these might affect people in terms of applying for benefits.

### Who is the talk for?

The slides are designed to be used by local branch representatives when first entering into a partnership with a local benefits agency.

### Time

The talk should take no more than 20 minutes and allow 10 minutes for questions and discussion.

### Accompanying materials

It may be useful to take a small selection of **MS Essentials** to leave with the advisers so they can do further reading after the talk. It would also be useful to guide them to the MS Society website, [www.mssociety.org.uk](http://www.mssociety.org.uk), and let them know that copies of all of our information can be found there and is free to download.

### What's in the notes?

An overview of each slide, additional points to highlight and space to jot your own notes down too.

**Top tip** Don't forget to check that you'll have access to a laptop and projector. Speak to your local staff member if you need to borrow one.

# Slides

## Slide 2

### About this talk

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>What it does</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduce your local MS Society branch</li><li>• Why we have set up our partnership</li><li>• Symptoms and variable nature of MS</li><li>• What our branch does</li></ul> | <b>What it <u>doesn't</u> do</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain MS symptoms in detail - MS is a variable, fluctuating condition with many symptoms that affect people in different ways</li></ul> |
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This sets the scene of what **will** and **will not** be covered in the talk.

## Slide 3

### Who we are

Add details here about who is attending to represent your branch and what their role is.

- **Name in 28pt bold text**
- Role in 24pt



Before the presentation, you need to enter the details here of who is attending the talk. It should give names and any branch office that person holds.

## Slide 4

### Why a partnership?

**People with MS can find it difficult to access benefits advice**

- **Physical symptoms** - can make it difficult to access advice centres
- **Cognitive symptoms** - additional support may be needed to help understanding
- **Emotional symptoms** - travel and talking about MS may cause excessive stress



This is a brief overview of why you have set up the partnership - remember not everyone in the room may have been involved in the negotiation of the contract and may not understand why the branch feel this partnership is needed.

It is important to highlight here that some people with MS may find it difficult to attend general benefits sessions because of their MS. You may want to highlight that some people with MS:


- find it difficult to travel to CAB offices
- find it difficult to wait in queues because of their symptoms
- may need morning or afternoon sessions because of their fatigue
- may need more than one appointment because they cannot concentrate for very long

## Slide 5

### Who do we support?

**We want to ensure the best help possible is available to:**

- all people with MS
- their immediate carers – people involved in the day to day care of a person with MS, who have a close family connection



Highlight that the service is open to all people with MS and their immediate carers, not just branch members.

## Slide 6

### Symptoms experienced in MS

- Many different symptoms - everyone's experience is different
- Some symptoms come and go and some are constant
- Symptoms may fluctuate over the course of a day
- Symptoms may be obvious or silent/ hidden
- Symptoms may be exacerbated by heat, stress or infection



This gives an overview of how symptoms can affect people and how they can vary from one person to another and on a day to day basis. It is important to highlight that it is different for everyone. Some symptoms may come and go, some may stay, some may go but people might not get back all the function they had before.

## Slides 7 to 9

### Symptoms of MS (1)

- **Balance & walking** - dizziness, sensory changes, muscle weakness, loss of coordination
- **Incontinence** - bladder and/or bowel
- **Vision** - blurred or double vision, temporary or permanent loss of sight
- **Fatigue** - overwhelming tiredness not linked to activity levels



### Symptoms of MS (2)

- **Memory & thinking** - difficulty recalling information, problem solving, word finding
- **Mood** - depression, anxiety or unusual emotional displays
- **Pain & altered sensation** - neuropathic and symptomatic, pins and needles, numbness, inability to detect hot and cold
- **Sexual problems** - in men & women



## Symptoms of MS (3)

- **Spasms & stiffness** - constant or intermittent, affecting delicate movements & large muscle groups
- **Speech** - slurring or altered speech
- **Swallowing** - problems chewing, food sticking in throat, coughing
- **Tremor** - small or large shaking movements, inability to pick items up



These slides show some of the most common symptoms of MS. You may like to give examples of these symptoms to put them in a 'real life' scenario for people.

### For example:

Tremor - this can vary from day to day and time to time. Someone may not have tremor all the time but having to pick up a cup to have a drink can bring on the tremor and make it very difficult for them to co-ordinate moving the cup to their mouth without spilling the drink.

## Slides 10 and 11

## Effects of symptoms (1)

- **Variability** - symptoms may change daily or depending on time of day. One symptom can make another worse, eg, pain can increase fatigue
- **Continuity** - symptoms may be permanent, or go on for a long or short time. May affect ability to start and/or finish a task.
- **Repeatability** - can do something once but perhaps not a second time



## Effect of symptoms (2)

- **Replicability** - may be able to do something in one situation but not another
- **Safety** - anxiety can lead to some people not feeling, or being safe to do things
- **Time** - simple tasks may take a long time



These slides highlight the effect of MS on an individual if they have a symptom and relate to some of the common questions asked on benefits forms such as:

### “Can you manage to dress yourself?”

Yes, but it can take a long time, will depend on their levels of pain or may depend on the time of day and levels of fatigue.

### Also highlight:

A person may now choose different clothes, i.e. may only wear pull up trousers as they can no longer manage buttons or zips.

## Slide 12

## Other things to consider

- **Understanding** - some may need more explanation to understand what you are saying. May be easier for some in the morning or some in the afternoon. Check what is the best time of day, especially if fatigue is an issue.
- **Written material** - some may have difficulty understanding written material because of sight or cognitive issues
- **Holding a pen/writing** - might be difficult due to tremor or co-ordination



This highlights some other issues that it is important for benefits advisers to understand about MS. Encourage them to check with the person whether they are better in the morning or afternoon. Or if they have fatigue, would they like more than one visit - perhaps two 30 minute sessions rather than one hour?

## Slide 13

### What our branch does

- Details of some of the activities your branch offers




You should give an overview here of the sorts of activities and services that your branch offers. Remember, some of the people using this service may not be members of the branch and may not know what is on offer. The advisers can refer people to the branch for activities that you offer.

## Slide 14

### MS professionals

- Add the contact details of any MS professionals in your area (such as the MS nurse or physiotherapist) **IF** they have given you permission to do so



Ask the MS professionals you work with if you can give the benefits advisers their name and contact details. The advisers may find this very useful in order to understand specific issues of MS when completing benefits forms for individuals.