Research Reporter

Your essential guide to what's new in the world of MS science

Welcome to the April 2023 edition of the Research Reporter!

Our biggest research news is our new clinical trial, Octopus, has started recruitment at its first hospital site in London. There's links on the next page to find out more, but what else has been happening?

Research Round up

January: Can more teenage sleep really ward off MS?

One piece of research from Sweden made the UK news, with headlines like "Teenagers Beware: Poor Sleep Quality May Increase Risk of Multiple Sclerosis". So we looked behind the headlines to find out more.

The researchers asked 2,075 people with MS and 3,164 people without MS to reflect on sleep habits when they were 15 to 19 years old. People who had the least sleep (less than 7 hours) had a higher chance of developing MS than people in the middle group (7-9 hours). But we need to be cautious:

- The information about people's sleep was retrospective. People might remember differently.
- It's possible a lack of sleep could actually be the result of MS rather than the other way round.
- There might also be other factors linked, but weren't studied by the researchers. Like diet or stress.

February: Virtual reality games to keep you motivated

On International Day of Women and Girls in Science on February 11th, we heard from one of our brilliant scientists in MS research, PhD student Amy Webster. She told us about her research into how virtual reality games could help people with MS to stay motivated to exercise.

Amy learned how to develop these virtual realities during her PhD. She said, "Game development is for everyone. There are those weird biases that this is a 'boy science', but that's completely incorrect. Don't let anyone get you down!"

March: New research projects are getting underway

Each year researchers across the UK apply to us for funding to support their studies. Together with science experts and people affected by MS, we review them and choose the ones we think could help people with MS the most.

In March, we spoke to Dr. Eleanor Doman, who's leading one of the projects starting later this year. She'll be researching how maths could help us understand MS and pregnancy. She hopes her project will help people with MS who are thinking about starting a family and reduce some of the uncertainty that comes with pregnancy.

Meet the Researcher

This issue's researcher to highlight is Dr Prince Nwaubani. He trained as a doctor in Nigeria, then studied for his Masters in biotechnology, a postgraduate certificate in genomic medicine and most recently his PhD at Brighton and Sussex Medical School. He specialised in psychiatry and now combines clinical work with research.

He told us about the work he did during his PhD, where he used MRI to investigate the link between brain inflammation and depression in MS. Along with a team, he focused on a particular brain region, comparing how it looks on MRI when people are newly diagnosed and after taking a disease modifying therapy (DMT).

Following the trial trail

Octopus

Octopus is our revolutionary mega-trial. Its multi-arm multi-stage design will transform the way we test potential treatments to slow or stop disability progression in MS. Thank you to all who were involved making this a reality, and all who will be involved as the trial gets underway!

Read the full news story on our website. And the BBC news article on their website.

If you're interested in taking part in Octopus, you can register your interest through the UK MS Register. When you register, you'll be asked where you live. This is so the closest trial sites can contact you when they start recruiting. For most people, this won't happen for quite a while. Trial sites are still getting set up and over 1000 people have already registered their interest.

ChariotMS

ChariotMS is testing whether a drug called cladribine can slow down the worsening of hand and arm function for people with more advanced MS. It has no upper age limit.

Professor Klaus Schmierer, leading ChariotMS, says "We've now recruited over a third of the people we need to make the trial a success. We're really proud of this progress, but we're still looking for lots more people to take part. There are hospital sites open all round the country!"

CCMR2

CCMR2 is testing whether two drugs together could help repair myelin, the protective covering around nerves. This could help slow or stop MS progression.

The team have recruited 29 out of their goal of 50 participants. Most people will be recruited through Addenbrookes Hospital in Cambridge. You can learn about our first participant on our website.

And finally…

You might have noticed this little octopus in some of the images on our website. We might see it again in the future.

But, it sadly has no name. If you've any ideas, you can send them in through this survey link.

If you'd like to know more about our research – get in touch!
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