Implementing a brain health-focused approach to multiple sclerosis care: global and local MS Brain Health initiatives

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Background
- A strategy to maximize lifelong brain health by minimizing delays in the multiple sclerosis (MS) care pathway was described in the widely endorsed policy report, Brain health: time matters in multiple sclerosis.1
- MS Brain Health aims to encourage implementation of the recommendations from this policy report by engaging with stakeholders at global and local levels.
- The current work aimed to define international standards for the timing of key events in MS care and to assess interest in quality improvement tools to compare local care with these standards.

Methods
- A modified Delphi process was led by four Chairs. A core Delphi panel of 29 MS neurologists and a Reviewing Group of 31 MS nurses, people with MS and allied healthcare professionals agreed to take part (Figure 1).
- Responses were collected via online surveys; the Panel remained anonymous to analysts and the Chairs throughout.
- The predefined threshold for consensus was at least 75% agreement, with a minimum of 66% of participants from round 1 completing the process.

Modified Delphi process
- Details of the methodology have been published previously and are briefly outlined below.
- A total of 21 time-related principles were derived from the recommendations in the report Brain health: time matters in multiple sclerosis.1
- Variables describing the principles in clinical practice were developed and the Panel suggested timings for ‘core’, ‘achievable’ and ‘aspirational’ standards for each variable (to reflect minimum, medium and high standards of MS care, respectively).

Developing standards for MS care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delphi Panel</th>
<th>Reviewing Group</th>
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<td>N = 29</td>
<td>N = 31</td>
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- Round 1 – free-text response comment on principles (n = 25)
- Round 2 – free-text response suggest time-frames (n = 24)
- Round 3 – multiple choice – suggest time-frames (n = 24)
- Round 4 – Likert scale vote on statements (n = 23)
- Round 5 – Likert scale vote on statements (n = 21)

The Delphi Panel was comprised of members from 19 countries.
- Consensus was reached on a total of 76 standards.
- Here, we present standards which the Panel agreed should be achievable in relation to a brain-healthy lifestyle (Figure 2).

Conclusions
- An international group of MS neurologists, MS nurses, allied healthcare professionals and people with MS has been involved in a modified Delphi process to define standards relating to early diagnosis and treatment.
- Tools to support MS services in achieving these standards of care would be welcomed by many MS healthcare professionals worldwide.
- An Australian MS Brain Health Community has been set up to encourage local implementation of the report recommendations and uptake of future tools. This is a model that we hope other countries will follow.

Survey: assessing global interest in tools

A survey was conducted at the ECTRIMS–ACTRIMS 2017 congress and online. Questions related to quality assessments, the collection of patient feedback in the respondents’ current practice and the respondents’ interest in tools to compare local MS care with international standards.
- A total of 131 people from six continents completed the survey (note, not all questions were answered by all participants).
- Overall, 72% (91/127) were neurologists, 17% (21/127) were nurses, 9% (11/127) practiced in North America.
- Of the survey respondents, 64% (78/121) worked in clinics that offered by the MS team, should be referred to appropriate services within 3 months of diagnosis.
- Of the survey respondents, 64% (78/121) worked in clinics that invited patients to give feedback on the care they receive and 70% (92/131) use international standards as a benchmark for assessments.
- In total, 93% (122/131) of respondents would consider using a tool to compare current practice in their clinic with internationally recommended standards and 91% (116/127) would find it helpful to receive patient feedback relating to those standards.

Case study: facilitating local change

MS Brain Health in Australia

- The global MS Brain Health Steering Committee is encouraging individual countries to set up local groups, with the aim of helping to drive the implementation of the MS Brain Health report recommendations1 and use of quality improvement tools locally.
- The Australian MS Brain Health Community, formed in 2017, is the first local MS Brain Health group (Figure 3).
- Membership includes MS nurses, MS neurologists, representatives from MS Australia (the national MS society of Australia), people with MS and community healthcare professionals.

- MS Australia has played an active role in promoting MS Brain Health recommendations, by:
  - asking the major political parties at the 2016 general election to commit to funding the implementation of the recommendations
  - making a pre-budget submission to the 2017 federal budget to fund a project to help implement the recommendations.
- We encourage other countries to adopt a similar local model.

- Promote the implementation of MS Brain Health recommendations
- Identify challenges and barriers to the implementation of these recommendations in Australia
- Deliver projects to target these barriers
- Actively identify and recruit MS Brain Health champions (advocates of the strategy to maximize lifelong brain health)

Disclosures
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