The Relationship Between MS and Suicide

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MS and Suicide: Creating a Safety Plan

Multiple sclerosis (MS) leaves a big impression on you. Unfortunately, the impression is a negative one. The physical impact takes a toll on you but, at times, the psychological impact can be worse.

People with MS are significantly more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and alcohol abuse than the rest of the population. It is impossible to say that MS is the direct cause of these symptoms but the relationship is something that patients and treatment providers cannot ignore.

Perhaps the most alarming statistic is the rate of completed suicide in those diagnosed with MS. With this being so high, safety plans and crisis intervention plans need to be standard practice in physical health and mental health settings for anyone with MS.

Build your Safety Plan

An effective safety plan starts with honesty. Take a look at your symptoms, your life and yourself. Though it may be unimaginable to consider suicide now, you know that MS causes changes and tomorrow can be unpredictable. An honest, written plan helps you:

- **Know your warning signs.** Think about your triggers. What are the thoughts, feelings, situations or behaviors of yourself or others that spark your symptoms? Does thinking about your future have you feeling hopeless? Do you feel irritated when you go to the doctor or have tests done? Recognize these warning signs. Write them down and prepare for them.
- **Know your internal coping skills.** These are the things that you can do for you to feel better. Complete a relaxation technique. Go for a walk or punch a pillow. Enjoy a good meal. What makes you better? Having these self-soothing skills reduces your need for others and maintains your sense of independence. Remember that relaxation and physical activities have natural anti-depressive and anti-anxiety properties. These are a great first defense.

- **Know your distractions.** Which people and what places can get your mind off the situation? Going to the movies, eating at a restaurant, watching TV and gardening are all beneficial activities. When used in moderation, these can change your thinking and give you relief from the world around you. When used excessively, distraction becomes escape or avoidance and these are counterproductive to your mental health.
- **Know your social supports.** Friends, family and other people in your life serve well to be the third line defense. Think of what supports you can contact if your coping skills and distractions are not helping your situation to the desired level. Write them down with their phone numbers. What would you do if you needed a friend and your cell phone was dead?
- **Know your professional supports.** Your therapist, your doctor and a suicide prevention hotline are good examples of professional contacts.

- **No weapons.** Make your house safe. Even if you think suicide would never be an option for you, it is not worth the risk. Take nonessential, dangerous things from the home. Bad news can come quickly and have terrible consequences. Making an impulsive decision could lead to major repercussions.

Conclusion

A written suicide plan is an essential part of treatment for anyone with MS. Involving and including your supports in the development is a good way to ensure a thorough vision. Make your wishes known and carry the plan with you. You do not want to be without it when you need it.