

The NHS needs to reset and reform services for neurology - now.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed NHS and social care, precipitating rapid transformation in services at a time of immense challenge.

The message has been clear from clinicians: we must chart a new course and establish a roadmap to recovery for multiple sclerosis (MS) services after the devastating impact that the coronavirus pandemic has wrought.

['NHS Reset and Reform: A new direction for health and care in multiple sclerosis'](#) is that roadmap, commissioned by the transformational healthcare educator '[Multiple Sclerosis Academy](#)'. The clear and actionable report assesses the current challenges facing MS services resulting from the pandemic, alongside those already apparent - overstretched, underfunded, inequitable services.

With funding support from Roche and contributions from a broad range of professionals across the MS community, the report establishes six core themes, such as leadership, workforce, and pathways. Facilitated by Professor of Neurology Gavin Giovannoni, healthcare consultant Sue Thomas, and business improvement mentor Anthony Lawton, the report brings together a wealth of experience and expertise from healthcare professionals and the voluntary sector. Each theme details the issues at hand, the opportunities for change, examples of innovation, and the steps we need to take now.

The scale of the challenge facing MS service delivery after the latest wave of COVID-19 is vast. The first pandemic saw a drastic change to MS service delivery with specialist staff redeployed to provide frontline NHS support, leaving a huge backlog of patients. Individuals have experienced altered infusion and pharmacovigilance monitoring schedules, delays to treatments, virtual appointments and delays or cancellations of clinics.

These pressures compound an already strained service. Resilience of staff is low, with MS services continuing to operate with insufficient funding and capacity for many

years. This situation is increasing health inequalities across populations, and MS teams feel overwhelmed and unable to provide the care they feel their patients deserve.

This report sets out much-needed potential solutions to these challenges, focusing on patient quality of care, staff wellbeing, expectation management and integrated planning as the keys to success for future services.

Gavin Giovannoni, Professor of Neurology, Blizard Institute, Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London, said:

"The COVID-19 pandemic is a once-in-a-lifetime event that has had an enormous impact on the NHS and the way we manage multiple sclerosis and other chronic diseases. To cope, we had to rapidly innovate, design and implement new ways of working. As we get ready for the tsunami of work post-COVID-19 we need to rethink our services.

We can't go back to the same old way of working. The 'NHS reset and reform' policy sets out a roadmap and a new direction for MS services. Carpe diem, we need to seize this opportunity to improve the outcomes and lives of our patients living with multiple sclerosis. It really is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Georgina Carr, Chief Executive for the Neurological Alliance, said:

"People with MS have experienced widespread disruption to their treatment, care and support during this pandemic. Many have experienced months of isolation, which is taking its toll on their mental health. On top of all of this, health and care professionals, who have been doing all they can to maintain service provision, are absolutely exhausted.

Listening to these experiences, and proactively building on the innovation that has happened during the pandemic, is absolutely central to building back better. This timely report sets out practical recommendations to help services do just that. On a national level, we urge NHS England and NHS Improvement to set out its own recovery strategy for neuroscience services as soon as possible."

David Martin, Chief Executive of the MS Trust, said:

"This compelling report highlights six areas in particular that can help transform the MS sector. Nothing will change without addressing workforce and capacity challenges through better utilisation of the MS workforce. There is a need for better leadership development for MS healthcare professionals, and the whole sector must work better together to ensure MS has a place in local priority-setting discussions to enable good service planning. Embracing these and the other recommendations in the report can only help to drive the successful implementation of the optimal pathway for MS which will finally emerge in 2021.

The MS sector has come so far in the last year. Many opportunities have emerged despite COVID-19. But they must now be seized proactively. Otherwise simply pressing Ctrl+Alt+Del and resetting MS services back to where they were in March 2020 would be letting down so many people living everyday with MS."

Sarah Gillett, Managing Director of Neurology Academy, said:

"We have been supporting healthcare professionals for years as they face these challenges, as they strive to do the best they can for their patients in the face of stretched services, underfunding, overwhelming caseloads and an awareness of the populations who are being left behind despite their best efforts.

We are proud to be supporting them now, by commissioning this report and setting out the steps needed to overcome these challenges, to improve the experiences of those living with MS - and the professionals supporting them."

Further information

About Neurology Academy

Neurology Academy is an innovative educational provider for healthcare professionals including consultants, specialist nurses, pharmacists, therapists and other allied health professionals. Our courses are developed by practicing specialists who combine their experience and expertise into case-based learning designed to create specialists in their field with confidence in effecting change.

We specialise in education, networking and mentorship across a range of conditions, each of which has its own 'Academy', of which MS Academy is one.

<https://neurologyacademy.org/>

About Roche

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