Meeting the health needs of people with motor neurone disease
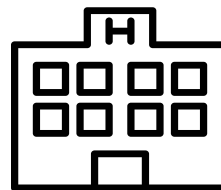
This fact sheet is **for health professionals** working with **people with motor neurone disease (MND)**.

- MND is associated with neuropsychiatric symptoms including frontotemporal dementia, depression, apathy, and disinhibition.
- **Research** from **3DN, UNSW Sydney** provides the first data on **mental health service use of this population**, along with information around broader health service usage.

Design: Population-based cohort study using linked datasets of de-identified health records from 2001-2015.

Sample: Adults admitted to NSW hospitals with a diagnosis of MND (n=2370). Data was analysed for the year prior to this index admission and 3-years post.

Reasons for inpatient episodes of care

The most common reasons for inpatient episodes of care for people with MND were:

Nervous system disorders (this included MND)

Factors influencing health (e.g. admissions for investigations or rehabilitation care)

Respiratory disorders

Symptoms, signs (e.g. difficulty swallowing), and abnormal laboratory findings (e.g. endocrine abnormalities)

Injury and poisoning

Actions health professionals can take

- Assess for strategies to reduce the **risk of falls** and **other accidents** due to loss of coordination.
- Consider strategies to reduce the risk of **choking**.

Mental health and MND

26% of people with MND were found to have co-occurring mental health conditions* in the year after their first admission to hospital for MND.

*Data from inpatient admissions and outpatient mental health services

The most common mental health conditions people with MND had in the first year after index* were:

Change after first follow-up year

1. Organic mental health disorders (e.g. dementia, delirium)
2. Mood disorders
3. Anxiety disorders
4. Mental and behavioural disorders due to substance use
5. Schizophrenia

*Admissions to general hospital wards with a mental health diagnosis recorded and admissions to psychiatric wards

People with MND used inpatient and outpatient mental health services:

3 times **more often** than the **general population**

Less than **half** that of people with **other neurological disorders**

❗ Use of mental health services was highest in the year after people's first admission to hospital for MND in our dataset.

🔑 People can face significant stress coping with their diagnosis and adapting to changes caused by MND. The current data shows a high level of need for mental health support.

💡 **Actions health professionals can take**

- Everyone should have access to mental health support, **especially earlier in the course of their illness**. Work with patients and families to find the right mental health support for them. **Professional care** is often required in addition to support groups.
- Depression can be masked by physical changes caused by MND and exacerbated by communication difficulties.[1] **Carry out a thorough assessment** if people present with symptoms that could indicate depression.

[1] https://www.mndaust.asn.au/Documents/Information-resources/MND-Aspects-of-Care-2017-FINAL-(1).aspx

The relationship between physical and mental health for people with MND

We looked at how **physical health** is affected by **mental health**. Individuals with MND who had **co-occurring mental health conditions***:

Had **less** episodes of care in hospital for **physical health** conditions than those who did **not** have mental health conditions*,

but spent **more** days in hospital per episode.

*Mental health diagnoses identified during hospital admissions or use of outpatient mental health services

🔑 People experiencing a mental health condition may face barriers to accessing appropriate care for physical health concerns.

💡 **Actions health professionals can take**

- Consider how physical and mental health **may be affecting each other**.
- Support people to manage mental health concerns and seek appropriate physical health care.

🔍 **Further information**

- The MND Association MND Care website (www.mndcare.net.au) has information on psychosocial support and referral pathways.
- See the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists clinical practice guidelines.
- See our MND project page for a detailed report and fact sheets for people with MND and carers.

UNSW SYDNEY

3DN DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY NEUROPSYCHIATRY

mnd Research Australia