

I'm an MS Navigator. Here's What I Want You to Know About Multiple Sclerosis and Suicide



Editor's Note: If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, help is out there. Reach out to the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-8255.

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My daily affirmation when I head to work each day is that I will positively impact at least one person by arming them with the resources they need, and reminding them of the value of their life.

I work at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society as an [MS Navigator](#) to help people diagnosed with [multiple sclerosis \(MS\)](#), their friends, and their family members make sense of a disease whose symptoms vary in severity from person to person.

Currently, there are [nearly 1 million people](#) in the United States living with MS — an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system which presently has no cure.

As an MS Navigator, I'm part of a team of highly-skilled, compassionate professionals ready,

equipped and willing to respond to anyone facing this daunting disease that can potentially change the way they live.

Living with a chronic condition can be overwhelming, but you're not alone

Before every phone call, I try to put myself in the shoes of the person on the line. Their new normal now includes oral or injectable medications to stabilize the disease progression, periodic MRIs to ensure there are no new lesions on their brain or spine, and often a lot of uncertainty.

I try to understand the caller who's in constant pain and no longer has the energy they used to, even though everyone around them says, "But you look so good."

In finding answers to their questions, I remind them of the [research advancements](#) in treating MS, and that each of those advancements provide hope that we will stop this disease.

We know that living with a chronic disease is overwhelming enough, but when coupled with the [isolation](#) of preventing potential exposure to [COVID-19](#), [anxiety](#) can increase, as well as [depression](#).

On any given day, I can receive up to 10 calls, chats, or emails ranging from the needs for emotional support resources to more critical interventions, such as [suicidal](#) thoughts.

One particular phone call comes to mind, from a woman who was both tearful and frightened. Our conversation quickly moved from referrals for support groups to discussing depression and [suicidal ideation](#).

Subsequently, I learned that she had a plan, intent, and means to end her life. I expressed my deep concern for her safety and informed her that I needed to contact the appropriate authorities.

I requested additional assistance from our crisis team, who worked in unison to identify and contact the local police department to initiate a welfare check.

You're not a burden to those you love

While waiting for the police to arrive, I stayed on the phone with her and continued to provide emotional support. We talked about her depression, and she shared that she was no longer able to participate in activities that once brought her joy.

She also disclosed that she felt she'd become a burden to her family and friends. She began to cry and stated, "I don't want to die, but MS has taken everything away from me."

I continued to listen and provide emotional support as her story unfolded.

The first responders arrived and took her to the emergency room, where she received the necessary intervention.

Even weeks after her hospitalization, we partnered to ensure that she connected with the appropriate community resources and mental health professionals to treat her depression

Your life is extraordinarily important

To anyone struggling with depression or suicidal thoughts: You don't have to face it alone. Reach out to someone you trust and [ask for help](#).

It was amazing to watch this woman's transformation once she received the compassion, support, and intervention needed to help her see how her life is extraordinarily important, and that even in your darkest hour there's help just a phone call or instant message away.

We will always be here for you

People affected by MS face daily challenges and uncertainties, but they're incredibly resilient in managing them.

The vision of the National MS Society is a world free of MS. Until that happens, MS Navigators are here to remind people that they're not alone on their journey and that we will always be here with:

- [Information and education](#) to help people with MS and their support teams powerfully advocate for what they need, when and how they need it.
- [Emotional support resources](#) for people with MS, as well as family and care partners, including [support groups](#) and ways to connect with others living with MS.
- Help through the complexities of finding a [healthcare](#) provider, benefits, insurance and access to coverage, and [employment](#).
- Resources to face [financial](#) challenges and [plan for the future](#).
- [Wellness strategies](#) that can make an impact on quality of life with MS including diet, exercise, emotional well-being, and connection to local wellness resources.
- Connection to [publications](#) to help understand MS, information and resources for b and the Society's quarterly magazine, [Momentum](#).
- Assessment for personalized case management through the [Edward M. Dowd Personal Advocate Program](#).
- Crisis intervention in times of need.