

Changes for the better at the National MS Society



by Cyndi Zagieboylo



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Every day we wake up to the realities of a rapidly changing world.

The National MS Society is changing, too. This past year we've gone through critical

organizational changes that affect everyone in the MS movement, especially our volunteers, staff and people living with MS. We are excited to share these changes with you!

Over several years—even decades—we examined the Society’s structure. We wanted to ensure that we remain relevant and always improve our effectiveness, now and into the future. Along the way, we listened, we learned, we watched other nonprofit organizations restructure, and we refined our approach to focus on being the best National MS Society possible.

We want to provide life-changing services with demonstrated impact nationwide. We want to increase the number of community leadership volunteers and provide talented employees with a rewarding career. We want to produce the most engaging event experiences for all participants. We want to invest more in MS research and solutions so people with MS can live powerfully. Our ability to do all of this at even higher levels is now possible because we have an aligned nationwide staff team with the expertise to continually increase effectiveness and impact.

So, let’s get to the question I bet is on your mind, “What does this mean for me?” Well, you might know Society staff members who have moved into a different role. Or you may be missing staff members who are no longer with the organization. To some people, that can feel like missing a friend who’s moved away. To others, it may feel like the Society is not as closely connected with your neighborhood. Changes like these can be difficult.

I want to assure you that the Society is here to be your supportive partner in navigating life with MS—no matter where you live. While our staff structure has changed, our commitment to address the needs of people affected by MS hasn’t.

That’s why we are reviewing each and every program to make sure it’s the most effective use of resources and has an important impact on people’s lives. At the same time, we are assessing what can be expanded and delivered throughout the country using a variety of formats—online, in person or over the phone. The way we implement services and conduct events may look different, but we now are positioned to reach more people, facilitate more connections and collaborate with more like-minded organizations—not just in some places, but across the entire country.

Although we can’t have an office and staff in every town, we are developing community councils to engage volunteers wherever there is interest to help you connect with other people who share your concerns and passions. We expanded our volunteer advisory committees, both local and national, to include a broader variety of perspectives to ensure that many viewpoints are considered as we make important decisions. We expanded volunteer event committees to drive participation and fundraising, and to produce memorable event experiences. There are other ways for volunteers to create impact in their communities—through Do-It-Yourself events, self-help groups or as MS Activists. It takes all of us to create meaningful change.

We remain focused on our vision of a world free of MS, and together we've made remarkable progress. The Society funded the foundational research that led to a breakthrough progressive MS therapy, Ocrevus®, and, through Society fellowships, we launched the careers of scientists who conducted this research. Also, Edward M. Dowd donated \$3 million over three years to establish the Edward M. Dowd Personal Advocate Program—a nationwide support service to address the most challenging problems that MS causes. Today, MS Navigators work as an integrated team to partner with and find solutions for everyone who calls, emails or writes to the Society with questions, concerns or needs. This program was not feasible in our prior structure when staff worked in separate units rather than as one nationwide team, and the quality of service depended on which part of the country someone lived.

These organizational changes better position us to accomplish our strategic plan to ensure both life-changing breakthroughs that enable people to live their best lives today as well as research breakthroughs that will ultimately end MS forever.

We will continue to improve and evolve to keep up with the changing world, and we will always strive to create the greatest impact.

I'm a finisher. I want to end MS, and I know you do, too. Together we are stronger! Let's continue to work together toward a world free of MS.

I welcome your thoughts. Keep in touch!

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Let me know your thoughts. Email me at cyndi@nmss.org.