

Study: Nearly 1 million people live with MS in U.S.



More than twice the previous estimate

by Marcella Durand

In the first national study of the prevalence of multiple sclerosis in the U.S. since 1975, researchers have determined that nearly 1 million people currently live with MS, more than twice the original estimate.

“For the first time in 40 years, [the study] provides an accurate estimate of the number of people living with MS in the United States,” says Nicholas G. LaRocca, PhD, former vice president of healthcare delivery and policy research for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and now an independent contractor. The study was published February 2019 in the journal *Neurology*.

“Having an accurate MS prevalence estimate along with incidence on a recurring basis helps to more optimally plan for clinical care needs and can provide helpful clues for researchers to better understand risk factors for onset and progression,” says Mitchell T. Wallin, MD, associate professor of neurology at George Washington University and University of Maryland School of Medicine, and the director of the VA MS Center of Excellence-East.

The updated estimate has already yielded fresh insights and understanding into the disease.

“The study demonstrated that there has been a steady rise in the prevalence of MS over the past five decades in the U.S., that the prevalence of MS remains higher for women than for men, and that a north-south geographic gradient still persists,” says Dr. Wallin. “Future

research will be needed to assess how prevalence is different within racial groups, how aging impacts the course of MS, and how MS incidence and mortality are changing in the U.S.”

Dr. Wallin and LaRocca worked together with a team of epidemiologists, neurologists and statisticians to develop the algorithm that allowed them to accurately identify people with MS based on health claims data. The team has noted that this algorithm has the potential to be used for other chronic neurological conditions, as well.

“This study tells us many things, but one thing in particular: Twice as many people need a cure,” says Cyndi Zagieboylo, president and CEO of the Society, which launched and supported the study.

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