

**(W31) SERVING PEDIATRIC CLIENTS & THEIR FAMILIES AT THE ALABAMA CHAPTER
OF THE NATIONAL MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY**

It is estimated that 2-5% of individuals with multiple sclerosis (MS) experience their first symptom before the age of 18. With an estimated 400,000 people in North America with MS, there could be 8,000 to 20,000 children and adolescents with MS. In addition, there appears to be a similar number of children who experience isolated demyelinating events of the central nervous system such as transverse myelitis (TM), optic neuritis (ON) and acute disseminated encephalomyelitis (ADEM). Whether TM, ON or ADEM are experienced as isolated events or recur, raising the possible diagnosis of MS, these complex disorders often have long lasting effects impacting the long term quality of life in children and adolescents.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) has undertaken initiatives to serve the youngest individuals living with MS or those suffering an isolated demyelinating event by funding six Pediatric MS Centers of Excellence across the US. However, incorporating pediatric clients at the local chapters of the NMSS, traditionally oriented towards adults, requires creative re-thinking of how services are delivered at the local level.

The Alabama Chapter of the NMSS has had a close relationship with the Southeast's Pediatric MS Center of Excellence, the University of Alabama at Birmingham's (UAB) Center for Pediatric Onset Demyelinating Disease (CPODD) since 2005 and has strengthened since funding began in 2006. This presentation will outline how this Chapter has included pediatric clients, including attending CPODD clinic, actively participating in CPODD educational events, providing financial assistance to families, including information about pediatric MS in their outreach efforts and piloting "cross-over" events aimed at both youth and adults. Future collaboration between CPODD and the Alabama Chapter will involve completion of a needs assessment to identify which types of programs available at the local Chapter would be most useful to pediatric clients and their families.

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