

(W08) ARE HIGHER LEVELS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT RELATED TO BETTER COGNITIVE PERFORMANCE?Caitlin Schultz, MA¹; Paula Bergloff, PhD²; F. Richard Ferraro, PhD¹; Susan Scarberry, MD²¹University of North Dakota (ND, USA); ²Meritcare Health System (ND, USA)

The psychological impact of multiple sclerosis (MS) includes both cognitive deficits and emotional disturbance. Additionally, MS can disrupt the social network of the patient. Changes in social support occur as a result of several factors, including a need for increased assistance with daily activities, uncertainty about the progression of the disease, and symptoms such as fatigue that may reduce the amount of social activities the individual is able to engage in. Despite these changes in social functioning, a large body of research has shown that the depression experienced by some MS patients can be alleviated by strengthening and improving social relationships. Because depression can exaggerate cognitive deficits, improvements in mood have been shown to lead to improved cognition. However, little research has documented the direct link between social support and cognition. The present study evaluated the neuropsychological testing results from 112 adults with MS to explore the impact of social support on cognitive functioning. The results showed that patients who reported higher levels of social support performed better on tasks measuring the ability to remember visual information after a short delay and confrontation naming abilities regardless of levels of depression. The type of social support that influenced cognition was also evaluated. Although further inquiry is needed, the results suggest that social functioning should be addressed even for patients who are not depressed. Potential application of the findings to clinical practice is discussed.

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