Untreated depression may interfere with self-management and reduce quality of life

Researchers led by Professor Judy Wollin of Griffith University, Queensland, in collaboration with Dr Rex Simmons of the MS Research Australia funded Australian MS Longitudinal Study (AMLS), have investigated the factors that influence quality of life for Australians with MS and their ability to actively manage their condition.

The research shows that while disability is an important factor, quality of life for people with MS is heavily influenced by a much broader range of factors including psychological, social and environmental conditions.

The findings have important implications for the continuum of care for Australians with MS and also support similar international findings. The results have been published in the International Journal of Multiple Sclerosis Care.

Professor Wollin and the team used the AMLS platform to survey 1,287 Australians with MS. Participants provided information on their physical health and disease severity and completed a range of standardised questionnaires to assess quality of life, perceived stress, self-efficacy (a person's outlook or belief in their ability to overcome challenges presented to them), depression and social support (measuring independence in day to day activities such as mobility, self-care, etc). Responses were compared from the start of the study and after two years.

Over the two year period, disability levels remained stable for 70% of the participants, however, on average, overall quality of life and well-being declined.

The researchers found that after accounting for disease severity, the major predictors for decreased quality of life were self-efficacy, depression and perceived stress scores.

The findings emphasise the need for health professionals to identify and provide strategies to address depression, stress, and positive coping mechanisms rather than only focus on addressing disability issues.

Professor Wollin stated, 'For health practitioners aiming to maximise self-management for people with MS, the first step should be to ensure that mood disorders are identified and treated appropriately. This will assist people with MS to take an active role in managing their disease and maximise quality of life.'