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6 Signs You've Found the Right Doctor to Treat Your MS

By Carol Coffin

Reviewed by [Dana Cooper, M.D.](#)

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Receiving a multiple sclerosis (MS) diagnosis can be overwhelming. But while you may initially feel frightened and confused, rest assured that you're not alone. According to a [study](#) supported by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS), nearly 1 million adults in the United States were living with MS as of 2017. The good news is that there are more treatment options and resources than ever before.

In fact, the number of available treatments for MS is at an all-time high. "The field has exploded, as has the science," says [Farrah Mateen, M.D.](#), a board-certified neurologist who specializes in MS at Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston.

"We currently have [more than 25 drugs for MS](#). Not so long ago, we had basically only the ABC drugs," Mateen says, referring to Avonex, Betaseron, and Copaxone, the first three [disease-modifying treatments](#) for MS, which became available in the early-to-mid-1990s.

But, as Mateen points out, "MS is a complex disease," so finding the right doctor to treat your multiple sclerosis is paramount. You want someone who possesses wide knowledge of the disease, has a firm understanding of treatment options, and will make you feel comfortable speaking about what you're experiencing. The following are six signs and qualities to consider in your search for the right MS neurologist.

1. They're Board-Certified in Neurology

Choosing a doctor who's board-certified is always a good idea. Board certification in neurology means that a physician has taken steps to complete a neurology training program (called a residency) approved by the [American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology \(ABPN\)](#), passed a certification exam, and maintains their certification by continuing to assess their performance and learn in their area of expertise.

It's important the neurologist is "familiar with the risks and benefits associated with the myriad [disease-modifying therapies](#)," which are the drugs used to treat MS, says [Pavan Bhargava, M.D.](#), a board-certified neurologist at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore.

A neurologist experienced in treating MS will also understand how certain drugs interact with other medications and how they work with other conditions you may have.

Take COVID-19, for instance. "Vaccines are a big issue," Mateen says. "Our treatments often suppress the immune system, and it's not clear if you get the same vaccine efficacy if you're immunosuppressed. So, some people may need to switch medicines. That's where the art comes in. It's not just picking a drug and saying good luck."

Many general neurologists are well-versed in MS, but if you're not getting the care or treatment you need, you may want to seek out a neurologist who specializes in MS.

"I am involved with MS groups, and many people talk about how their neurologists don't believe their pain or that certain symptoms are associated with MS," says Kay Gandy, 56, of Frisco, Texas, who has had relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis (RRMS) for seven years. "They usually aren't seeing MS specialists."

2. They're Endorsed by Reputable MS Organizations

Established nonprofit organizations, such as the [Multiple Sclerosis Foundation \(MS Focus\)](#), the [National Multiple Sclerosis Society \(NMSS\)](#), and the [Multiple Sclerosis Association of America \(MSAA\)](#), are invaluable sources of information—and a great place to start (or continue) your search for an MS neurologist.

"My local Philadelphia chapter of the NMSS was like a lifeline for me," says 57-year-old Kerri Woodman, of Langhorne, Pennsylvania, who was diagnosed with RRMS in 1998. "They have doctor referrals and awesome programs."

You can call your local MS organization to see if they have recommendations for you or [search the NMSS website](#) for healthcare providers with knowledge and expertise in treating multiple sclerosis, as well as centers that provide care for people with MS.

3. You've Had a Word-of-Mouth Recommendation

"Most of my referrals come from word of mouth," says Mateen. "Most people know somebody with MS, so there is usually a good network going on."

A word-of-mouth referral is, in effect, a testimonial for a doctor by a satisfied patient. So, in addition to verifying credentials, which can be easily checked, and reading patient reviews, which can be found on a variety of sites, including [Healthgrades](#) and [Zocdoc](#), word of mouth can be a great way to find a neurologist.

4. They Embrace a Team Approach

Because of the complexity of MS and the many aspects of your health that it affects, it's a good idea to work with a neurologist who uses a team approach to treatment. Your MS healthcare team may also include a psychiatrist, physical and [occupational therapists](#), a neuro-ophthalmologist, and a urologist.

"The doctor should also have an MS nurse who is well-trained, well-informed, and willing to answer patients' questions," Mateen says. In many cases, you may be communicating with the nurse often, so you should feel comfortable with them, too.

If you're living with MS, you may see your neurologist only once or twice a year. So, what happens in between appointments when issues or problems crop up?

"I can ask questions through **MyChart**, and [my providers] normally get back to me pretty quickly," says Kay. Nevertheless, sometimes a face-to-face is called for, says Mateen: "I think talking things out is really effective. Booking an appointment gives you the time to ask all your questions."

6. You're Happy with Their Bedside Manner

Kerri, who left her original neurologist early on, recalls, "The man who diagnosed me said, 'You have something called multiple sclerosis, and you will be in a wheelchair in five years.' He never passed Bedside 101."

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