

A Recent Survey Shows that 44% of Irish People have Poor Understanding of the Symptoms and Nature of Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

A survey commissioned by MS Ireland and Novartis Ireland to mark World MS Day 2019 explores the public's awareness of the visible and invisible symptoms of MS.

May 30, 2019

While 93% of people in Ireland claim to be aware of MS, more than 44% consider their understanding of the symptoms and details of the condition to be poor with nearly one third of respondents unable to list any symptoms related to MS¹. The survey conducted in April 2019 by IPSOS/MRBI, was revealed to mark World MS Day by MS Ireland and Novartis who join with MS organisations around the world as part of the 'My Invisible MS' (#MyInvisibleMS) campaign exploring public awareness around the invisible symptoms of MS and the impact it can have on day to day life.

Although more than a third of the population (37%) claim to have a family member, friend, or loved one living with MS, and 66% of people in Ireland believe they have a good understanding of MS, there are still some key aspects of the condition that remain unclear¹. When asked if MS was more prevalent amongst men or women, almost half (45%) of participants responded that MS affects men and women equally. In fact, MS is at least two to three times more common in women than in men.

Nine thousand people³ and their family members live with Multiple Sclerosis across Ireland. Although MS is a progressive neurological condition that can affect a person's health, lifestyle and relationships, many people with MS find ways to manage and cope with many of the effects and difficulties. Symptoms vary from person to person and each person is affected by the condition differently.

Some of the symptoms of MS are immediately obvious. Reduced mobility is often the most visually apparent. Other symptoms such as fatigue, changes in sensation, memory and concentration problems are often 'invisible' symptoms and can be difficult to explain to others.

Ava Battles, Chief Executive of MS Ireland said, "While many people are aware of MS and the more visible, tangible symptoms that it can cause, the effects of MS can vary greatly from person to person and can often be invisible to those around them. Through this market research and our World MS Day activity we hope to raise awareness around the less visible aspects of MS and how it can impact on the day to day life of a person living with the condition."

Loretto Callaghan, General Manager and Country President, Novartis Ireland commented, "We are delighted to support MS Ireland on World MS Day and to bring the results of this survey to the general public. It is so important that the community of people living with MS in Ireland feel that their condition is properly understood by their peers and this is something that can only happen by spreading awareness through initiatives such as World MS Day."

Levels of awareness around the more visible symptoms of MS among the public are relatively high with almost 20% of those surveyed listing muscle degeneration, and 17% naming loss of mobility¹. Only 8% of people

identified fatigue as a key symptom despite almost 90% of people living with MS reporting fatigue as a consequence of their condition^{1,3}.

Commenting on the launch of the survey findings, Professor Orla Hardiman, Consultant Neurologist at Beaumont Hospital, Professor of Neurology and Head of the Academic Unit of Neurology in Trinity College Dublin and the HSE National Clinical Lead for Neurology said, “The findings highlight how prevalent MS is in our society today with nearly 40% of the population being impacted either directly or indirectly by the condition¹. It’s important that as a community we educate ourselves on the symptoms that affect the day to day lives of people living with MS, especially those that are not immediately apparent and less visible.”

1. Survey commissioned by MS Ireland and Novartis and completed by IPSOS/MRBI, April 2019.
2. MS Ireland website [online]. Available at: <http://ms-society.ie/pages/living-with-ms/what-is-ms/first-questions>
3. Societal Cost of Multiple Sclerosis in Ireland 2015 [online]. Available at: <https://www.ms-society.ie/news/launch-societal-cost-ms-report>

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List of links present in page

- <https://www.novartis.com/ie-en/ie-en/stories/recent-survey-shows-44-irish-people-have-poor-understanding-symptoms-and-nature-multiple-sclerosis-ms>
- <https://www.novartis.com/ie-en/taxonomy/term/61>
- <http://ms-society.ie/pages/living-with-ms/what-is-ms/first-questions>
- <https://www.ms-society.ie/news/launch-societal-cost-ms-report>