



The Nova Scotia Multiple Sclerosis Integrated Database (NS MSID) Update Project

INVESTIGATORS: T. Jock Murray, Multiple Sclerosis Research Unit
Murray G. Brown, Community Health and Epidemiology
John D. Fisk, Departments of Psychology, Psychiatry, and Medicine
Ingrid S. Sketris, College of Pharmacy
Dalhousie University

Canada has one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis (MS) in the world, and Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates in Canada – more than double the national rate. MS, an auto-immune disease affecting the brain and spinal cord, is the most common neurological disease affecting young adults in Canada – one in every 500 Canadians. Every day three more Canadians are diagnosed with MS. Currently, there is no cure, and there seems to be more questions than answers. For more than 20 years, the Dalhousie Multiple Sclerosis Research Unit, led by Dr. Jock Murray, has been investigating the mystery that is MS.

Since its founding in 1979, the Dalhousie MS Research Unit has built one of the longest-running, most detailed patient databases in the world – the Nova Scotia Multiple Sclerosis Integrated database (NS MSID). It may be the most extensive MS research database of its kind in existence and of immense value in the search for a cure. It is a rich source of information that has enabled the Unit to ask and answer many questions about MS. Because of the long-term nature of the database, which predates the development of novel new treatments, the Research Unit can trace the "natural history" or natural course of MS and how it progresses without treatment. Now that treatments exist, the database provides a baseline for measuring the success of new therapies, to see if the natural progression of MS can be altered by medication and other therapies and to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of these treatments.

As the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of these expensive new drugs is an important scientific, clinical and policy issue in Canada and internationally, the database is an extremely valuable research tool. Thanks to a grant from the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation, Dr. Murray and his colleagues updated and enhanced the database, which had included statistics up to 1994.

The NS MSID now covers 1979 to 2003 and will continue to be updated to April 2004, as part of a cost-effectiveness study of new MS drugs. The research database integrates clinical data from the Dalhousie MS Research Unit and Nova Scotia health services utilization data, making it a powerful tool for many types of interdisciplinary research. It also provides a model for the creation of integrated research databases for other chronic diseases.

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

T. Jock Murray
Multiple Sclerosis Research Unit
Dalhousie University
Phone: 902-494-2514
Email: Jock.Murray@Dal.ca



Research Results