

New Challenges - Fresh Directions - 2007

This year the Multiple Sclerosis Society will decide on a five-year strategy.



Chief Executive Simon Gillespie explains:

We're the largest charity in the UK that works on behalf of people living with MS, and that means we have a responsibility to get things right.

The MS Society has five clear and key aims, but there are decisions to make so that we can give good service to those aims, and help bring about a world that is free of MS.

Our main aims?

We support research. This is at the heart of what we do.

We provide high quality information and support. People now have access to more and better information about their condition. The MS Society's information on MS - through the magazine and other publications, our [web sites](#) and information centres - sets a standard of which we can be proud.

We work to improve care and services. Here we have taken on a number of areas, not least the part-funding of 80 MS nurses in the NHS through the Society's MS Nurse Fund. Ten years ago, there were just a handful of MS specialist nurses. Now there are around 200, making them the point of contact for many more people.

We are an authoritative voice on MS. Our membership base remains strong, making us one of the most representative of the health charities. Across all four UK nations, the Society can speak out with authority. We've shown we can mobilise.

We are committed to involving people living with MS in the work at every level of the MS Society. The MS Society is served by a dedicated group of volunteers and staff. Our network of well over 300 local branches spans the UK, all run by volunteers, all providing valuable support locally for people living with MS.

Changes and challenges

Many of the challenges we face today are the same as those faced by Sir Richard Cave and the group of visionaries he led in establishing the Society 53 years ago. But look back over even the last decade and you can see change, both in the world of MS and in wider society.

MS research continues apace, and scientists know much more than previously about what happens in MS. We are proud to fund the MS Society Cambridge Centre for Myelin Repair, the MS Tissue Bank, the MRI scanner in London that is dedicated to MS research, and the new MS Research Centre at Edinburgh University.

In a decade of change, we've seen disease modifying treatments become available for MS, and more are on the horizon.

Over the last decade, MS care has been shown to be at its best when a multi-disciplinary team of professionals works together to tackle all the different things that can happen in MS. In England and Wales, NICE Guidelines for MS now describe the kind of health care to which everyone should have access and the MS Society across the whole UK is using the guidelines to press for higher standards. Turning good practice guidelines into a reality is one of our challenges now.

Other big challenges have emerged – to do with 'social care' or the care you get from local councils. We've seen the good that Direct Payments can do, when people are supported, and we look forward to Individual Budgets becoming a reality.

But we also see now how local councils are tightening up and restricting their services to fewer and fewer people, making many people with MS and those who care for them struggle even harder to cope.

This year, the MS Society will set a new five-year strategy. Our key aims remain the same, but we need to make sure that the steps we take over the coming years are the best ones that will help us achieve these aims.

We know already that research remains a high priority, and I was able to announce at the Society's AGM 2006 that the MS Society will double the amount of money it spends on MS research in the next two years. Similarly, our provision of information, our campaigning and publicity, and support through our national and local networks, will carry on.

But our structures and our programmes across the UK need to respond to **new challenges**, and we will need **fresh directions**.

Watch for opportunities to have your say, both in [MS Matters](#) and on the [Web Site](#)