

Microsoft, Berlex and the National MS Society Collaborate to Assist People with MS Stay Connected

Microsoft, Berlex and the National Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society have embarked on landmark collaboration to help people with MS maintain their health and stay connected.

Recognizing the advantages that technology brings to people with MS, leaders from the pharmaceutical, technology, and patient advocacy — have united to improve the way technology may help people with MS maintain their health and independence, have support for their life choices, and stay connected with their families, friends and communities.

In the alliance, known as the MS Technology Collaborative, Berlex Inc. Microsoft Corp. and the National MS Society, will work together to understand the needs of people with MS and to provide access to the technology and resources they need to stay connected to their communities and the world. A project steering committee composed of people with MS from across the country will oversee these efforts to help ensure that the outcomes from the project address the unmet needs of the MS community.

In today's digital environment, people are embracing technology that has revolutionized the way they conduct business, interact with their family and friends, and manage households. For some people with MS, technological advances may offer benefits, but they can pose challenges. For example, some MS symptoms can make tasks such as seeing a blinking cursor on a computer screen, manipulating a mouse, or remembering when to take medication difficult.

MS is an unpredictable neurological disease that affects an estimated 400,000 people in the United States. A new case is diagnosed hourly. Often, MS is diagnosed in people between the ages of 20 and 50. It can cause vision problems, tingling or numbness, trouble maintaining balance, fatigue or weakness, loss of coordination, problems with walking, or lapses in memory. These problems might be permanent, or they might come and go without warning. While there is no cure for MS, early and effective treatment is an important component of helping to control its progression. One goal of the MS Technology Collaborative is to explore the ways in which effective treatment and the use of accessible technology can together enhance the welfare of people with MS.

“Having MS means something different to each person with the disease, so we are especially excited to identify new and customizable solutions to help expand and simplify how people with MS stay connected to those around them,” said Joyce Nelson, president and CEO, National MS Society.

As a first step, the MS Technology Collaborative will conduct a survey of people with MS to understand how they use technology throughout their disease and in their professional and personal lives. By fully understanding how people with MS use technology, the MS Technology Collaborative aims to create a personalized, interactive, Web-based program that will deliver tailored information to each individual with MS. The survey will also explore how MS symptoms may have affected major decisions in their life. Individuals interested in participating

in this landmark survey or those wanting periodic program updates can register for additional information at <http://www.MyMSMyWay.com>.

“At Microsoft, we are dedicated to creating technology that adjusts to individuals’ needs as they change over the course of a day, a year, a lifespan — including those with MS or any other type of condition,” said Rob Sinclair, director of the Accessible Technology Group at Microsoft. “We believe that technology will help people with MS maximize their abilities, even as those abilities change.”

Another goal of the MS Technology Collaborative is to raise awareness of how existing technology can help fulfill personal and professional goals, showcasing how technology can flex to the changing needs of each person with MS. Altering screen settings on computers, using a trackball instead of a mouse, sending text messages to remind one when to take medication — all may help a person with MS navigate daily challenges.

Because MS is a highly variable and unpredictable disease and each person may experience a number of symptoms with varying degrees of severity and/or frequency, the MS Technology Collaborative will try to meet individualized needs by offering a robust, online portal of existing resources and information, including basic tips for selecting appropriate technology. For those not experiencing any symptoms related to their MS, the knowledge that there is a comprehensive resource with tips, testimonials and additional insights available to them might help mitigate their fears of what the future may hold.

“Multiple sclerosis and its impact on people’s lives need to be fought on multiple fronts through effective treatment, comprehensive support systems, and practical technology tools,” said Dr. Ludger Heeck, vice president and general manager of Specialized Therapeutics at Berlex. “Berlex was the pioneer in providing effective drug therapy and comprehensive support programs to people with MS, which allows us to bring a deep and specialized understanding of MS to this project. By combining the strengths of each Collaborative member with the personalized perspective offered by the steering committee, we believe this unique approach will have a strong, positive impact for people living with MS.”

Berlex, Inc. is a U.S. affiliate of Bayer Schering Pharma AG, Germany, which is a subsidiary of Bayer AG.

To learn about the National MS Society visit www.nationalmssociety.org or call or 1-800-344-4867 to learn about ways to help manage multiple sclerosis and about current research that may one day reveal a cure.

Information about accessibility and Microsoft can be found at <http://www.microsoft.com/enable>.