Multiple Sclerosis Causes Excessive Deaths, Study Says

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Information on causes of death for patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) in the United States is limited. In this study, researchers tried to explore the underlying causes of death in these patients.

Patients with MS enrolled in the OptumInsight Research insurance database between 1996 and 2009 were matched to patients without MS by age/residence at index year and sex. The cause from the death certificate most directly leading to death was determined using an algorithm. In 30,402 patients with MS and 89,818 matched controls, mortality rates were 899 and 446 deaths/100,000 person-years, respectively. Excluding MS, differences in mortality rate between patients who had MS and non-MS comparators were largely attributable to infections, cardiovascular causes, and pulmonary problems. Despite its limitations, including assessment of only insured patients, this US database study confirms that MS is responsible for an excessive number of deaths and that these are dominated by infections, particularly pulmonary infections resulting from aspiration. MS tends to affect swallowing, coughing, and breathing late in the course of the disease. Delaying the onset of swallowing and breathing problems will have a big impact on patient survival.

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