

Evergreen Rounds

Specialty care highlights for medical providers

MS Center at Evergreen

- Comprehensive MS Care
- New Medications
- High-Tech Neurorehabilitation

September 2010

Excellence in Comprehensive MS Care

With its new home in the DeYoung Pavilion as part of the Evergreen Neuroscience Institute, the MS Center at Evergreen offers clinical care and research focused exclusively on multiple sclerosis.

“People are unaware that we’re specializing in the comprehensive care of MS, which is different from a multi-specialty neurology practice where providers see other types of neurology patients,” says Virginia Simnad, MD, medical director for neurology at the MS Center. Both neurologists at the center – Virginia Simnad and Lahar Mehta, MD – are dedicated exclusively to MS care, along with one of the few MS-trained rehabilitation medicine specialists in the country, Ted Brown, MD.

“The advantage is that we’re keeping up to date on the latest trends in both research and clinical care models,” says Simnad. “We’re also in line with other MS centers nationally in terms of providing not only clinical care but opportunities to participate in research, and we’re in a position to attract scientifically sound Phase II and III trials that push the science forward,” she says.

The MS Center at Evergreen, which opened in 2006, has grown in scope with the addition of nationally recognized MS experts. “Our program approaches MS as a multifaceted disorder that spans decades, with a tightly coordinated network of specialists who can assist in providing depth of care to maintain function, independence and quality of life as long as possible,” says Simnad.

The MS Center offers the latest technology and national protocols for diagnostic studies, using the 3T MRI – the strongest magnet clinically in use. “We’re following the guidelines of the National MS Society for protocols to provide uniform, high-quality MRI studies that we can use as a baseline for future study comparisons to track progression of the disease,” says Simnad. Patients come from as far away as Alaska for the center’s comprehensive care. Clinic appointments allow the treating physician to address all of a patient’s

At a Glance

- Comprehensive, compassionate care with providers dedicated exclusively to MS care
- A Center of Excellence with the National MS Society
- 3T MRI with National MS Society protocols
- Gait Analysis Lab and other high-tech PT, OT, speech therapy and neurorehabilitation
- Infusion therapy
- Access to clinical trials
- Expertise in monitoring the latest drugs and side effects
- Commitment to prompt patient scheduling

MS-related issues and bring in support staff, such as a nurse or social worker, as needed.

Partnership with Referring Physicians

While the MS Center can take over a patient’s care if requested, Simnad makes it clear that the model is one of collaboration. “We’re interested in providing services that may not be in place in a primary care or general neurology practice,” she says. “Our goal is a team approach, coordinating care and communicating effectively without a sense of undue competition for patients.”

Along with comprehensive care, the MS Center offers consultative services. “We’re reaching out to general neurologists to help them with the fairly challenging and complex patient population of MS,” Simnad says. Even one-time visits can address issues such as breakthrough symptoms, decreased response to medications, and increased disability – and offer guidelines to expand or update a patient’s care plan to improve quality of life. ■

Featured in This Issue:

At the MS Center



Virginia Simnad, MD, MSc

Neurology
*Medical director
of neurology*



Lahar Mehta, MD

Neurology



Ted Brown, MD, MPH

Rehabilitation Medicine
*Medical director
of neurorehabilitation*

To Refer

Please call 425.899.5350 to refer patients for consultation or comprehensive care at the MS Center.



Vol. 6, No. 3

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Evergreen Hospital Medical Center is a community-based health care organization with more than 800 staff physicians in over 50 specialties serving residents in the Puget Sound region. Evergreen's clinical excellence and breadth of services are among the most comprehensive in the Pacific Northwest.

New Medications and Clinical Research

A new era of drugs is arriving.

"The first oral agent, fingolimod, looks very promising and is on the verge of being approved in the treatment of relapsing-remitting MS," says Lahar Mehta, MD, a neurologist with a subspecialty of clinical research in MS. "It appears to be more effective than other agents but has more peculiar cardiovascular and pulmonary side effects."

Currently, all six FDA-approved medications for MS are administered either by injection or infusion. Patients are eager to try an oral drug, but close monitoring of side effects is critical. "Having participated in various studies using similar compounds, we are very comfortable with prescribing these emerging therapies," says Mehta.

Another new drug, dalfampridine (Ampyra), approved in January 2010, helps some patients improve walking speed. "It basically promotes nerve impulses in nerves whose conduction is affected by MS," he says. "While not everyone benefits from it, for the one out of four patients who do, it's a very useful adjunct medication."

Research To Advance Care

The MS Center conducts research to enhance clinical care and offer patients the latest therapies. Current clinical trials include:

- assessing the efficacy of two potential new oral therapies for relapsing-remitting MS (RRMS);
- comparing the efficacy of three approved treatments for RRMS;
- biomarker studies that may help identify patients more susceptible to treatment side effects; and
- an oral treatment for MS-related pain.

For more information and key contacts for clinical trials at the MS Center, visit our "Multiple Sclerosis Clinical Trials" page on the Evergreen Neuroscience Institute site at www.evergreenhospital.org/ms. ■

High-Tech Neurorehabilitation

"Most patients with MS need rehabilitation for mobility, hand function, cognitive function or bladder issues," says Ted Brown, MD, MPH, medical director of neurorehabilitation at the MS Center. "One thing that separates us from other centers is the integration of new technology into patient care, such as a Gait Analysis Lab to record gait parameters and track changes with treatment over time." Mobility is a major focus in MS.

"We have a comprehensive team offering PT, OT, speech therapy and neuropsychology, including a social worker for vocational rehabilitation, since only about one-third of MS patients can stay in the workforce," he says. Brown is also involved in research on stress, pain management and new technologies in MS. ■

The MS Center

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