

Multiple Sclerosis & Employment



Employment for people with MS

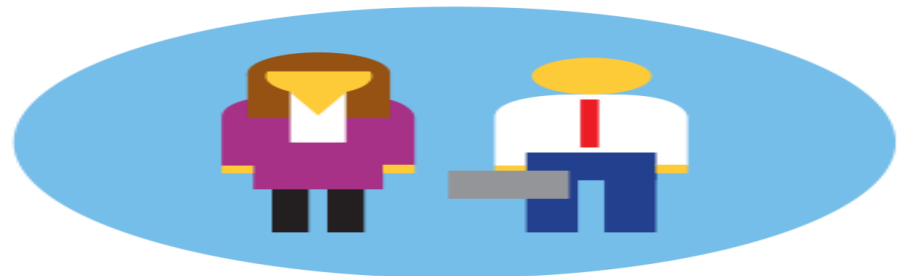
Harriet Doig - Information, Advocacy and Research Officer, MS Ireland

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Background

Why the need for employment resources?

- Employment is a major issue for people with MS
- MS Ireland provides support and guidance on employment via our Regional Community Workers and Information Line
- A key part of MS Ireland's advocacy agenda



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Key Questions People with MS Have

Will I be able to
continue working?

Do I need to tell my employer
about my diagnosis?

Will my employer
be supportive?

How will MS affect
my career progression?

What are
my legal rights?



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Will I be able to continue working?

Many people with MS continue working full-time many years after diagnosis.

In a recent survey of 595 people with MS, just under half were still in paid employment.

BUT it does depend on what job you do and how your MS affects you.

Working Life
People share their experiences working with MS

My Working Life with MS
Naomi Donaldson

Did you tell your employer about your diagnosis? Why (not)? How did they react?
My sister also worked with us and she had been diagnosed with MS the year before I was. Work were very understanding so it was a no brainer for me to tell them.

What (if any) adjustments have had to be made in your working environment?
Small things like getting a new chair, footrest, moving desks to be nearer to the bathroom. And looking after myself.

My boss is so understanding if I'm not feeling 100% I can work from home, or not feel guilty about taking time off to get back to full health.

I try to eat the healthy option in the canteen now... it's not always possible though...the lasagna and bangers & mash are hard to resist

I've also got a disabled parking permit as commuting was a nightmare between stress of buses being late or not turning up! FREAK OUT, if I'm not in the office at least 15 minutes before I'm supposed to start work, the dreaded bladder control issues meant that an hour long bus journey was not possible and changes in temperature can bring on flare ups of MS

What type of employment do you have?
I'm a Customer Experience Specialist for RaboDirect, my job is mostly office based working with the operations and marketing teams, it also involves a small amount of travel.

Were you working when you were first diagnosed with MS? What type of work were you doing? What else?
I was working for RaboDirect as Customer Care Team Lead, running the customer care center for the business. I managed a team of six staff dealing with customer queries and complaints. The job could be stressful at times and sometimes involved long hours.

MS Ireland
THE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF IRELAND

NOVARTIS



Do I need to tell my employer?

Disclosure

- You do not have to disclose to your employer that you have MS **UNLESS** your symptoms pose a potential health and safety risk to yourself or others.
- Ultimately, this choice is a personal one.



Do I need to tell my employer?

For

- Your employer may be able to provide you with supports if they know about your MS
- Trying to hide your illness may be an additional source of stress and worry

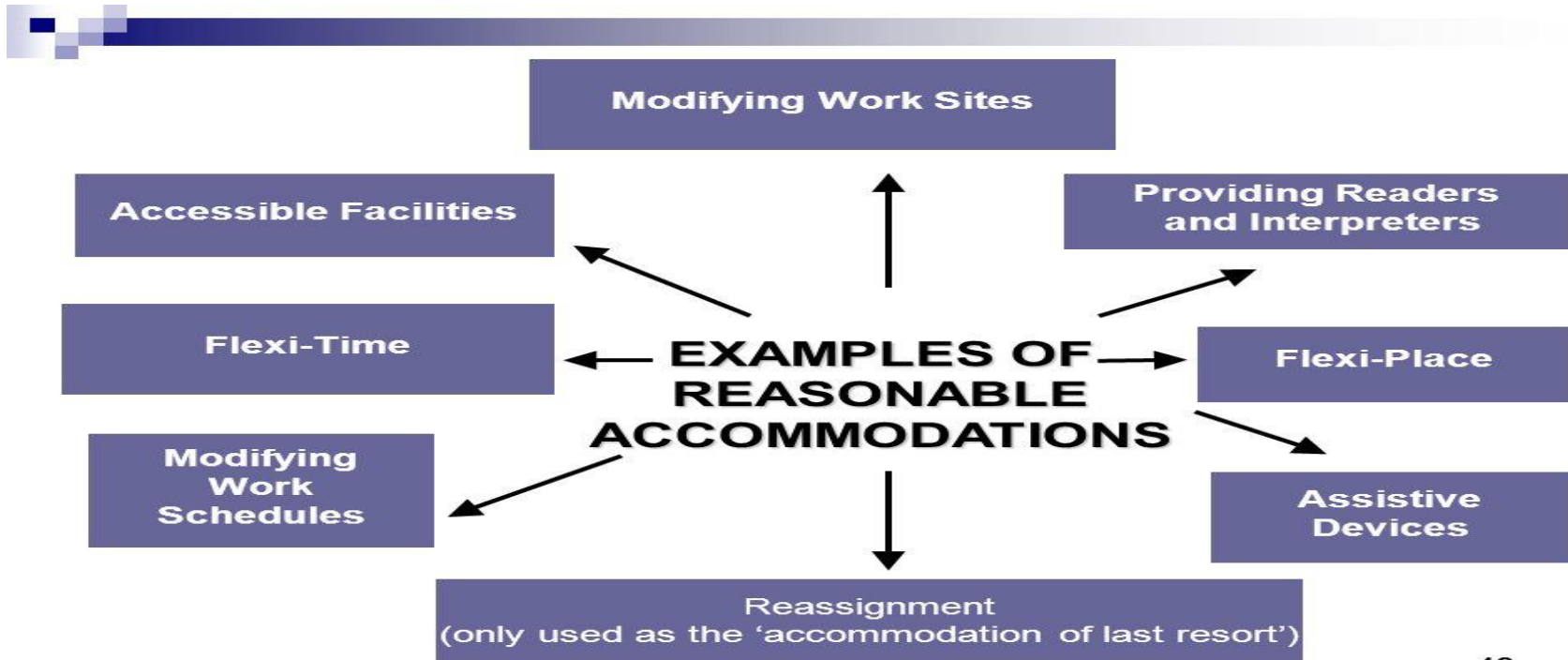
Against

- Potential for discrimination
- Fear of being seen as different/less capable



Will my employer be supportive?

There are lots of ways that an employer can support an employee with MS. Many cost little or nothing.



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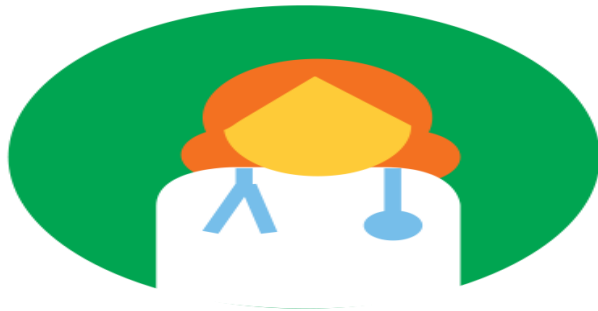
Reasonable accommodations:

- Changes to work schedules to allow more regular breaks
- Allowing an employee to perform some or all of their work from home
- Allowing an employee to sit rather than stand in jobs that usually require standing for long periods, such as a cashier
- Offering a quiet place/location with a couch or chair to take rest during the day
- Installation of handrails in the toilets
- Use of voice recognition or screen reading software
- Moving a desk nearer to the toilet



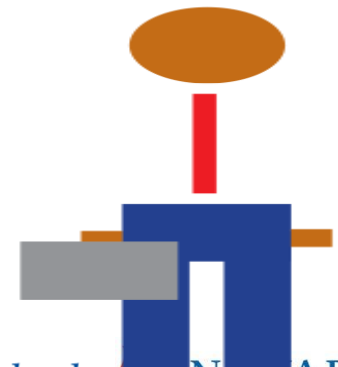
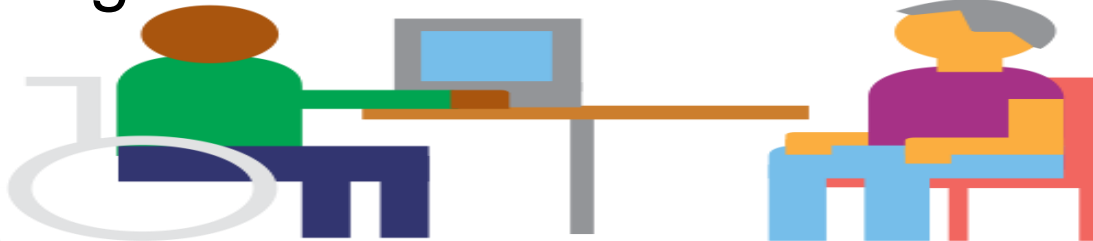
Will my employer be supportive?

- Your employer may arrange an occupational health assessment – speak to your HCP team for advice.
- There are various financial supports your employer may be able to access e.g. Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant.



How will MS affect my career progression?

- While some jobs or career paths may be more suitable than others, MS won't necessarily stop you pursuing any specific careers.
- If you do decide to consider retraining or returning to education, there are various organisations who can help – e.g. AHEAD, Employability.
- There may also be financial supports available – e.g. Back to Education Allowance.



What are my legal rights?

- MS is covered by the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015, meaning it is illegal to discriminate against an employee or potential employee because they have MS.
- Employers are obliged to **try** and make reasonable accommodations.
- Employers are not obliged to make reasonable accommodations that would be disproportionately expensive.



What are my legal rights?

If you feel your employer has treated you unfairly:



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Employment resources



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Multiple Sclerosis and Employment

Facts and Figures

Policy recommendations:

- Development of specialised early intervention guidelines to support those absent from work to return to work as soon as possible when and where appropriate.
- Access to appropriate and timely workplace assessment services from specialists who have a detailed understanding of particular illnesses and conditions.
- Access to on-going in work supports for both employers and employees.
- Appropriate post-employment planning, including access to retraining services and vocational rehabilitation services where necessary.
- Extension of entitlement to medical cards and other associated benefits on return to work, to avoid the 'welfare trap'.

It is also crucial that people with MS have access to interventions that reduce relapses and disability progression, including early diagnosis and treatment, regular monitoring, and timely access to appropriate medications and therapeutic supports including neurorehabilitation.



Dissemination and future plans

- Available on the MS Ireland website straight away; share on social media
- Distribution of resources via MS Ireland services – Regional Community Workers, Branches, Information Line, website
- Approach neurologists/MS Nurses regarding making the resources available in clinics
- Employer toolkit dissemination via IBEC newsletter
- Approach Employer Disability Information Service regarding hosting of the toolkit for employers on their site
- Approach Department of Social Protection/Department of Justice and Equality/NDA to request an opportunity to present data and policy recommendations
- Practical workshops on MS and employment for PwMS – first at MS Ireland conference in September 2016
- Continuing advocacy work on the need for improved access to healthcare services



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