

Ohio advocate stresses importance of proper diagnosis of MCS

Lurking in those products that seem to make our lives so much easier and that save us precious time are poisons that often lead to disabling conditions, or even death. And Toni Temple ought to know, having battled a disinterested public and the skeptical medical establishment for many years.

As founder of the Ohio Network for the Chemically Injured (ONFCI) in the early 90s, she and her organization initiated HB389 (Rep. Pringle) in the 93-94 session to educate physicians to better diagnose toxic poisoning. The broader description of this condition is Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS).

Since World War II, says Temple, the massive growth of chemical production in so many areas of our daily lives combined with our natural genetic immune points of weakness cause many to experience a wide variety of disabling and life-threatening conditions. Included in the long list of diseases that can result from MCS are several forms of anemia, Attention Deficit Disorder, Depression, Diabetes, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Alzheimer's Disease, Peripheral Neuropathy, Allergies, Asthma, Lupus, Fibromyalgia, and Parkinsons Disease.

Frustrating MCS advocates are the number of physicians who simply have not made themselves aware of current toxicological literature, and are then unable to ask the right questions to uncover a toxicological diagnosis when patients present their symptoms. Temple and others who live with chemical sensitivities every moment are determined to attack the lack of awareness at all levels because they know the dangers firsthand.

Temple attributes a toxicological profile on zinc, by the Agency for Toxic Substances (ATSDR) of the Center for Disease Control, for saving her life.

The booklet "Taking an Environmental History" is available from ATSDR. Temple advises anyone with unexplained pain, fatigue or bouts of illness who is not being diagnosed properly to request the booklet and begin to search for what might be ailing him or her.

Since doctors often are reluctant to diagnosis MCS because of the medical community's reluctance to perceive MCS as "scientific enough," it is important that patients take responsibility for their own health and encourage their doctors to take continuing education courses in toxicological and environmental illness, and to use the Internet to learn more about chemical sensitivities. Too often, doctors are prone to explain away symptoms, rather than associate the symptoms as directly connected to chemical toxicity.

Through ONFCI efforts, Southwest General Hospital in Cleveland has adopted full MCS policies and procedures to ensure chemical free environments for patients and provide doctors and nurses pertinent information. In addition, the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (NEETF) has in place a ten-year Physician Education Program.

Temple is most concerned that everyone ought to take MSC seri-

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MCS (cont.)

ously, because we all are exposed continually to toxins in products and in the environment. "If you are diagnosed with cancer, it may have been from chemical exposure ten years earlier," she explains. "Genetic make-up determines where we have weak spots in our immune systems. Long-term exposure to perfumes, latex, disinfectants or many other chemicals often lead to disabling and life-threatening conditions."

She explains that one person's immune system will cause them to react immediately to a pesticide truck spraying in their area, while someone else in the same room has no reaction until ten years later. The point, says Temple, is for all of us to avoid exposure to such toxins whenever we have the choice to do so, regardless of what others may think of such proactive behavior.

The U.S. Access Board in Federal Register has recognized MCS as a disabling condition, but Temple voiced concern that "most in the disability and medical community do not." She believes access issues for people with chemical sensitivities are as important as they are for people with traditionally recog-



Toni Temple, Parma, founded the Ohio Network for the Chemically Injured.

nized disabilities. The Access Board has contracted with the National Institute of Building Scientists to create guidelines to make buildings safer for people with MCS. Poor

indoor air quality, mold, perfumes, carpet, and cleaning products are just a few of the barriers confronting people with MCS everywhere they go.

Another area of concern to ONFCI is the problem of drug reactions and interactions. In 1998, the American Medical Association listed the fourth leading cause of death to be acute drug reaction.¹ For

example, Temple says, a person can have exposure to a chemical that causes depression, and so is prescribed an antidepressant, which can cause Parkinsons Disease and asthma and further depression. She recommends that we read the more complicated drug information insert that comes with prescriptions, not just the abbreviated one the pharmacist gives you.

So what does all this mean for those of us who have given MCS little, if any thought up to now? Temple sincerely hopes that when you experience symptoms that are not being explained sufficiently, you take several steps:

1. Keep a diary or journal to attempt to identify a pattern of your symptoms: where and when they occur, and the activities and products with which they may be associated.

2. Educate yourself: learn the symptoms associated with MCS and read all you can find about their causes. A good search engine will produce credible material on MCS.

3. Ask your doctors to take a continuing education course in toxicology and environmentally related health problems and refer them to helpful web sites.

4. Do not take a doctor's initial diagnosis as "law"! You have a right to question. The Institute of Medicine of the National Academies in 1999 reported that the eighth leading cause of death was medical error.² You know your body and know when something is not right and needs further investigation.

For more information, contact:
The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry of the Center for Disease Control, www.atsdr.cdc.gov, 1-888-422-8737
National Environmental Education and Training Foundation, www.neetf.org, (202) 833-2933
Ohio Network For the Chemically Injured (ONCFI), PO Box 29290, Parma, OH 44129, (440) 845-1888,

¹ Journal of American Medical Assoc., 1998 279(15): 1200-1205

² Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, Nov. 29, 1999

