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Oral abstracts

In presentation order

Active participation in sport for individuals with multiple sclerosis.

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Background and aim(s):

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is commonly diagnosed in young adulthood at a time of prime participation in an active lifestyle involving sport, employment and family life. Exploration of the experience of participating in sport, for individuals in the early stages of MS, is necessary to identify how to maintain or introduce an active lifestyle. The aim of this study is to explore the experience of participation in sport with individuals with MS.

Method:

A qualitative descriptive study utilising three focus groups was conducted with individuals living in northern Queensland, Australia with a diagnosis of MS. Individuals with an Expanded Disability Status Scale score of 0-4, indicating full ambulation, were included. The sporting experience, together with enablers and barriers to participation was explored. Data were analysed thematically using NVivo software.

Result(s):

Sixteen individuals, fourteen female and two male with a mean age of 41 years (\pm SD 11) participated in the study. Most participants were undertaking sport, for example running, cycling, boxing, dancing and squash. Independence was a key driver for sport, with a view that it would maintain mobility and enable social participation. Barriers to sport encompassed personal and environmental factors such as fear, cost, family constraints and tropical temperatures. Individuals' support strategies to negotiate barriers and facilitate activity were often developed through experience rather than formal advice or support. Access to a health professional with knowledge in MS in relation to sport/exercise was perceived to be beneficial but was however, uncommon.

Conclusion:

Sport was considered to be important for maintaining independence and facilitating an active lifestyle for people in the early stages of MS. Personalised advice and direction from professionals towards suitable exercise were recommended, particularly in the early stages of the disease.