

Multiple Sclerosis in the Contemporary Age

Understanding the Millennial Patient with Multiple Sclerosis to Create Next-Generation Care



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KEYWORDS

- Multiple sclerosis • Millennials • Generation X • Baby boomers • Telehealth
- Telemedicine • Mobile applications

KEY POINTS

- Most patients diagnosed with MS over the next 10 to 15 years will be from the millennial generation.
- Patients with MS of the millennial generation may be greater challenged by specific health disorders (ie, obesity and mental health disorders) in comparison with other generations.
- The collective millennial personae are more cost conscious, desire more immediate feedback, and are less likely to have a primary care physician compared with the generational cohorts before them.
- Effective care for a millennial patient with MS will require the use of technology to emphasize prevention and provide education, especially within the first year of diagnosis.
- More financial resources and incentives will further help increase the engagement of millennial patients with MS.

BACKGROUND

Millennials, most commonly defined as those born between 1982 and 2000, became America's largest subpopulation in 2015 at 83.1 million, exceeding the baby boomers' generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, for the first time.¹ A wealth of information has been published describing the preferences and characteristics of this new

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dominant generation.²⁻⁵ The term “millennial” dates back to 1991 when Strauss and Howe used the term to label the latest generation at that time.⁶ Overall, millennials have been described as sheltered, confident, and team-oriented.⁷ The most defining characteristic of the millennial generation is undoubtedly their usage and demand of technology. They are “digital natives”: they have grown up with computers and the Internet from an early age and, hence, use technology in almost every aspect of their lives. It has been estimated that 80% of millennials sleep with a cell phone by their bed,⁸ 63% feel like they are attached to their phone or tablet, and 36% feel that social media has “helped them find their identity.”⁹ Even millennials themselves feel this is their most defining characteristic; “technology use” was the most popular answer when millennials were asked what makes their generation unique.⁸ Besides being technologically savvy, this generation is also the most ethnically and racially diverse generation in history,¹ and is on track to become the most educated generation, especially among women.¹⁰ Of course, one must be wary of overgeneralization when attributing characteristics to people solely based on their birth year. Acknowledging the potential life cycle effects, period effects, and cohort effects on this generation creates a more mindful understanding of millennials. Life cycle effects refer to how young people may become more like older generations as they age themselves, whereas period effects speak to how individuals are impacted by major events differently depending on where they are in the life cycle. Cohort effects explain how period events may impact millennials more strongly compared with other generations because the events are occurring during a very formative time in their lives.¹¹ All in all, using a generational approach remains valid because even as a widely heterogeneous group on the individual level, as a cohort, the generation is still unmistakably different from the generations before them.

These stark differences between generations initiate changes in corresponding industries as a new generation comes of age. Common teaching practices have already transformed to account for the millennial generation in the classroom. Around the year 2000, the millennials “went to college,” sparking dialogue on the best teaching practices to engage this new millennial learner. In the more recent years, curriculum and educational practices of graduate-level instruction have been the center of educational reform as the millennial generation enters this stage of life. The concept of a “flipped classroom” is gaining momentum as the learning style specifically accounts for millennials’ preference of interactive learning.¹² Passive learning is done outside of the classroom where lecture videos are posted online for the student to view on their own time and at their preferred pace. Class time is then reserved for active learning with a focus on critical thinking, teamwork, and collaboration with the instructor. Increasing technology and social media use in multiple aspects of the learning experience was also a common adaptation to the traditional learning experience made by multiple institutions. Displaying a Twitter hashtag on the online learning portal for an especially difficult neuroanatomy module helped raise morale, relieve anxieties, and facilitate communication among second-year medical students.¹³ When millennial radiology residents were given iPads to help supplement and facilitate their residency program, 70% reported a preference for reading journals on the iPad.¹⁴ Another medical institution used the push technology of Twitter and Facebook to deliver educational content to their students in a manner more similar to updates or notifications.¹⁵ Incorporating more interactive learning, social media, and online resources into the classroom setting has allowed teachers to more effectively reach the millennial generation. In essence, the education sector has realized that to be an effective teacher, it is imperative to understand the student.

Just as the education system has transformed and adapted to the demands of the millennial generation, so too will the health care system as this generation ages. It is

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