

# Technology Plays A Critical Role In The Lives Of People With Multiple Sclerosis Few Use “Accessible Technology” To Overcome Disease-Related Challenges

(NAPSA)—Multiple sclerosis (MS), an unpredictable neurological disease, poses visual, dexterity and cognitive challenges that can make it difficult for people to perform everyday tasks. According to a new survey of 2,390 Americans with MS, technology plays an important role in helping them live with the disease. But the survey also showed that relatively few people with MS use special tools known as “accessible technology”—such as alternative computer mice or voice-recognition software—that could help them overcome disease-related challenges.

“When I was first diagnosed with MS, one of my biggest fears was not knowing how MS would affect me,” said Keith, a business transformation analyst in Norwalk, Conn. “How do you prepare yourself for such an unpredictable disease? But now that I’ve been living with MS for 14 years, I’ve learned about devices and tools that help me pursue the same goals I had before my diagnosis.”

Nearly half of people surveyed agreed that “technology plays a vital role in helping me live with MS.” In fact, a much higher percentage said they use computers and the Internet compared with a separate survey of the general population. But when asked if they use accessible technology to make everyday tasks easier, few people with MS indicated they are taking advantage of these tools:

- Thirty-three percent said they have trouble typing on a standard computer keyboard, but only 5 percent said they’ve made related adaptations, such as using



**People living with MS learn about accessible technology and landmark study at the MS Technology Collaborative booth during the nation’s largest MS conference in Dallas.**

a special keyboard or voice-recognition software.

- Thirty percent said they have trouble reading text on a standard computer screen, but only 6 percent have made adjustments to their computer’s settings, such as increasing font size or using screen magnifiers.

- Nearly half (44 percent) have had to change their employment status, including switching from full time to part time or leaving work altogether, because of their MS symptoms. Yet very few took advantage of adaptations that might have helped them stay in the workforce: Only 12 percent asked their employers for more ergonomic equipment, tools and furniture, and just 5 percent requested changes to the technology they use.

Why don’t more people with MS use accessible technology? The survey points to several possible reasons. Approximately one-third of respondents said MS makes it harder to learn to use

new technology, and more than half said better information is needed about what tools and resources are available. Half also cited affordability as a barrier to using technology.

According to the MS Technology Collaborative, accessible technologies can be easy to learn and many are standard features of the average computer operating system—so they don’t cost extra. Many of these tools also are adaptable, so they can accommodate ever-changing symptoms.

To better inform people with MS about their technology options, the Collaborative has launched a personalized, interactive program called Snapshot on [www.MyMSMyWay.com](http://www.MyMSMyWay.com).

“Living with MS can be a lot easier if you know what tools are at your disposal,” said George H. Kraft, M.D., M.S., professor of rehabilitation medicine and adjunct professor of neurology at the University of Washington, and director of the Western Multiple Sclerosis Center. “Snapshot is a great way for people with MS to learn how to use technology to fulfill their personal and professional goals.”

The MS Technology Collaborative was formed in March 2007 by Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals, Microsoft and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society to better understand how people with MS use technology and to connect them with information and resources to help move their lives forward. Visit [www.MyMSMyWay.com](http://www.MyMSMyWay.com) to view Snapshot and other resources developed by the Collaborative.