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Cure for Multiple Sclerosis (MS) still elusive

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There is an urgent need to understand the underlying mechanisms of MS



World Multiple Sclerosis Day, falling on May 30 every year, invites dialogue on the disease between different stakeholders across the globe.

The fact that symptoms flare-up and subside for many people with multiple sclerosis (MS), combined with the wide variety and unpredictability of symptoms, has made MS a difficult disease to recognize, define, and treat – right from the start.

MS exists in India, but the prevalence is lower than in European and American populations. The phenotypic presentation of MS in India appears to be very similar to that of the West, and some of the genes in Indian patients are also similar to those found in the Western patient population.

In 2022 alone, the Global Multiple Sclerosis Drugs Market size was valued at $24.64 billion and is poised to grow from $25.40 billion in 2023 to $32.43 billion by 2031, at a CAGR of 3.10% during the forecast period (2024-2031).

While there is no cure for MS, there are treatments that can reduce the number and severity of relapses and delay the long-term disability progression of the disease. For instance, corticosteroids, such as intravenous (infused into a vein) methylprednisolone, are prescribed over three to five days.

Roche Pharma, a global leader in healthcare, announced introduction of a groundbreaking therapy for MS in India on 27th February 2024. Ocrevus (Ocrelizumab) has been launched as the first approved treatment for both Relapsing-Remitting Multiple Sclerosis (RRMS) and Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis (PPMS). Ocrevus is a monoclonal antibody designed to destroy B-cells, a type of immune cell with a central role driving inflammation in MS.

However, cost is a major challenge here. This treatment is priced somewhere between 9 and 12 lakh. Thus, limited affordability and access to expensive MS drugs can restrict their adoption and limit market growth, particularly in regions with lower healthcare budgets or inadequate insurance coverage.

Another observation is that the introduction of new oral drugs like Siponimod (BAF312), Tecfidera, Laquinimod, and Ozanimod is driving the segment's growth. But due to their greater efficacy and convenience, injectable medications are becoming more and more preferred over oral ones.

Hence, there is an urgent need to understand the underlying mechanisms of MS to develop affordable and effective solutions to treat this condition.

Recent studies conducted by researchers at institutions such as the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) have shed light on potential biomarkers for MS progression, opening up new avenues for early diagnosis and targeted intervention.

In a recent development, Multiple Sclerosis Society of India (MSSI), a non-profit organisation, is set to collaborate with the Sudha Gopalakrishnan Brain Centre at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras for advanced research into the cause of the chronic immune system disorder.

Through innovative research, collaboration, and technological advancements, companies and researchers in India can push the boundaries of science and bring hope to millions of people affected by this debilitating disease.

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