

LOST IN A SEA OF CALLS: GETTING A BETTER HANDLE ON MS PATIENT PHONE CALLS

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Introduction

- Telehealth is a key component of the nursing role in Multiple Sclerosis (MS) clinics.
- Patients with a chronic and neurodegenerative illness such as MS value having rapid access to a health care professional who can provide advice, guidance, and support
- MS nurses often struggle to manage the high volume of calls from increasingly complex patients while attending to other competing job demands including seeing patients in the clinic each day
- In order to develop patient-responsive care management systems, there is a need to better understand MS patient phone call patterns:
 - Who are the callers?
 - What are they calling about?
 - How easily and effectively can nurses help patients resolve their health issues via phone?

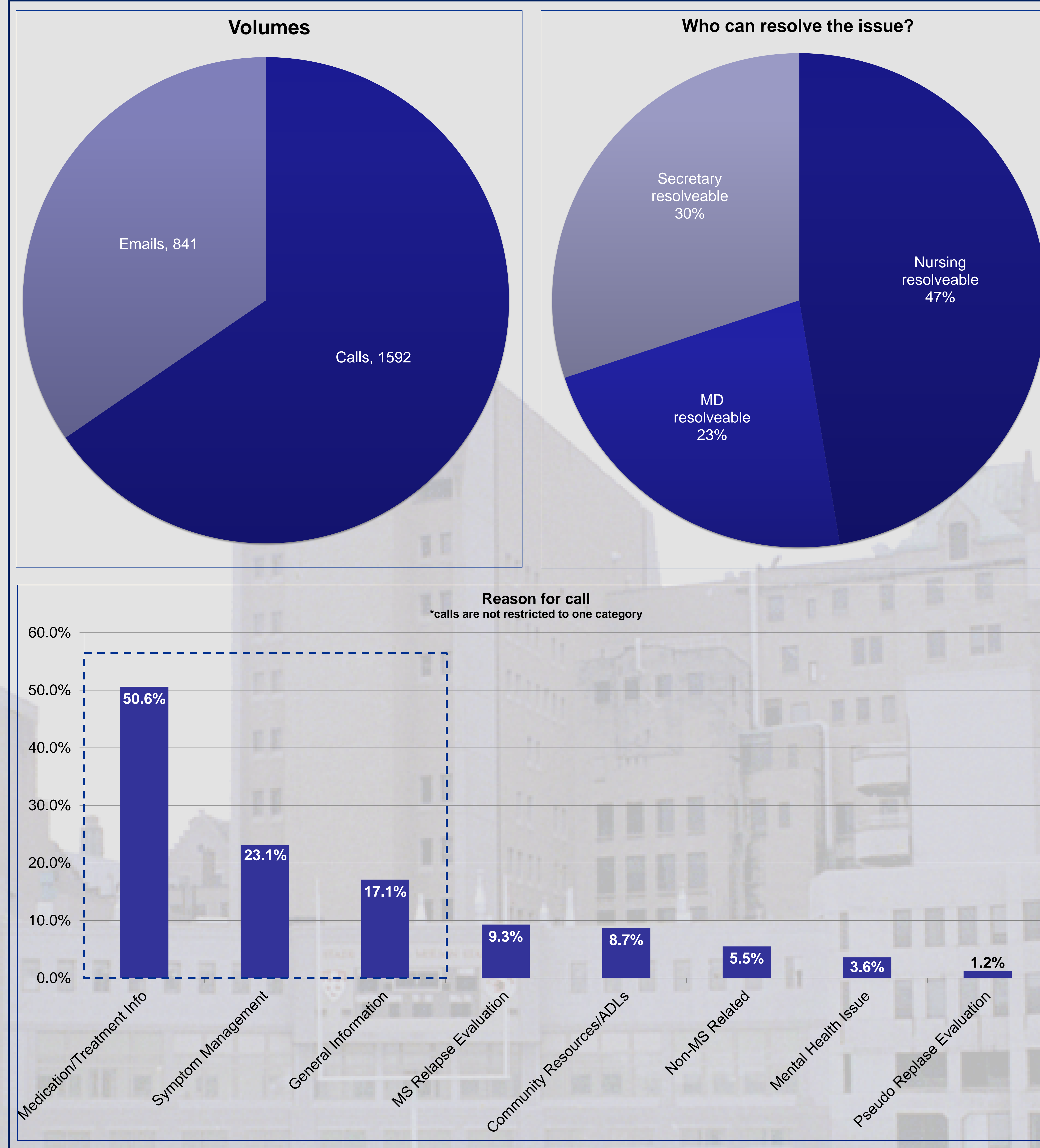
Methods

- A phone log was developed to evaluate:
 - Call volumes
 - The reason for the call
 - If the issue could be resolved by a nurse alone
 - Factors related to call complexity
- The data categories were based on expert clinical opinion and a review of the literature of factors related to the complex needs of MS patients
- The two nurse clinicians in the MS clinic completed the phone log on a daily basis for a 9 month period
- Calls included those from patients, as well as family members and caregivers

Results

- It's not just about calls anymore
- 34.5% of communications are by email
- Nurses can resolve ~1/2 of all communications
- Complex call features:
 - Disease specific features (e.g. cognitive impairment and psychiatric co-morbidities)
 - Lack of primary care
 - High distress with insufficient coping resources
 - Mismatch between patient expectations and what the team can realistically provide
 - Complex care coordination

Results



Discussion & Nursing Implications

- Data from this phone log helped inform:
 - A rapid access MS nursing phone helpline to balance patient expectations and service delivery
 - Group teaching sessions for patients considering Alemtuzumab initiation

Future Directions

- There is a need to further evaluate the “frequent flyer” group of patients who call the clinic on a regular basis.
 - What characteristics define these patients?
 - Could their needs be met in a different fashion?
 - What other supports and resources are needed to enhance their sense of self-efficacy and empowerment?
 - How can we support them to develop their own coping strategies?
- Advances in technology have led to unrestricted access: need to redefine accessibility parameters

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