Epidemiology and current treatment of multiple sclerosis in Europe today

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Abstract—Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic disease affecting the central nervous system, usually leading to early disablement in young adults. At least 350,000 persons in Europe have the disease. Wide variations exist both between and within European countries in the incidence and prevalence of the disease as well as in the general standard of care for MS patients. The needs, well-being, and social participation of people with MS are systematically influenced by their physical and cultural environment and the nature of the community services. Moreover, the rate of introduction of the new disease-modifying therapy also widely differs from country to country. This article helps clinical researchers to understand better the differences in epidemiology and in the current treatment of MS in Europe.

Key words: incidence, multiple sclerosis in Europe, prevalence, treatment.

EPIDEMIOLOGY OF MS IN EUROPE

During the past 50 years, more than 150 descriptive studies on multiple sclerosis (MS) in Europe have been published. Despite considerable scientific effort, much of the variations of the distribution of MS found in different European countries may reflect, at least in part, methodological differences in surveys, especially in case ascertainment and selection.

Scandinavia

The distribution of MS in Scandinavia was studied over several years by Kurtzke (3–5). The high-frequency areas in the north appeared to describe a “Fennoscandian focus,” in the southern inland lake region of Sweden. This probably is where MS originated in the early 18th century and diffused across the Baltic states, northern Europe, and other countries (4). Actually, the frequency of this disease is variable, and in some areas, incidences...