

July 20, 2009

I would like to express my most sincere thanks to each of you who participated in my research study on the impact of multiple sclerosis in caring relationships.

This study, supported by the MS Society and the University of Melbourne, is now complete. You may recall that I advertised throughout MS Australia in 2002/03 for participants for the first phase of this study. Over 200 of you completed and returned questionnaires. A wonderful response! Your surveys provided vital data that formed the basis of my research.

In the second phase of the study, I conducted face to face interviews with 24 of the participants. These 12 couples (carepartners) consisted of one person with MS and an identified spousal carer. Thank you for generously sharing your unique experiences of life with MS. You spoke of many pressing concerns and gave examples of personal coping strategies. Your individual stories provided valuable insights for health professionals and agencies offering care and support for couples coping with the daily impact of this 'uninvited guest' on their lives and relationships. You have helped to give a voice to many people in similar situations who otherwise may never have been heard.

Your personal experiences had strong common themes emphasizing in the need for health professionals, working as a team, to provide empathic and flexible support for the caring relationship as it changes under the impact of MS over time. A need for regular contact with a knowledgeable and caring MS professional or peer was also identified as well as a need for further research in this very important area of study.

I believe my findings will not only assist health professionals to work effectively with individuals and couples coping with MS but will also focus the attention of policy makers on the special needs you have identified.

Without your help this project would not have been possible. Thank you once again.

My contact details have changed since the study began in 2002. If you care to know more about this study I can be reached at: bzuluaga@tpg.com.au