

Sal's Place

Opinion

MCS Can Be Deadly

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is a life changing illness. As an invisible disability, often not apparent to others, a person with MCS not only faces chemical barriers, but also social and attitudinal barriers, which researchers say carries the risk of misunderstandings, misinterpretations of behavior, reactions of doubt, victim blaming, and worse, trivialization of symptoms. These barriers exist as a result of others not being able to visibly see the disability of MCS, since symptoms are not often visible to others and instead manifest in fatigue, pain, respiratory problems, cognitive decline, and general health decline, none of which is apparent to the naked eye.

Well-meaning friends and family often selectively ignore the patient's needs or make hurtful comments such as "stop panicking", "if you just take a deep breath everything will be fine", or "now you know you are exaggerating". These comments ignore the reality of the condition and the patient's life, and instead may serve to make the patient feel isolated, alone, misunderstood, resentful, and hurt. Continued interactions like this eventually generate anger from the patient, which often escalates the hurtful comments from friends and family in denial. A life that could be made better by easy accommodations that focus on ability, rather than disability, is instead inflicted with emotional harm, which some then say is the cause of the illness, though in reality the emotional issues were inflicted as a result of those in denial.

Would it not be understandable that

despondency then begins to develop? Left alone, out of the loop, with no help, no support, and no compassion, victims of MCS struggle on **alone**. The struggles they experience from their symptoms being trivialized, while society ostracizes them and falsely strips every bit of their credibility begin to take a toll. Frustrations mounts and emotional pain makes one think of ways to end the pain, this pain that need not be, for lack of the understanding of friends and family in denial.

Soon well-meaning, but innocently ignorant, people begin to make demands on the disabled individual. These demands may include things like insisting the disabled person get useless counseling, return to work, and stop this foolishness. Eventually financial assistance is cut off, those in denial thinking that when the patient "hits bottom" they will finally wake up and get help. If only!

Financial stress ensues, worsening the condition. Sometimes housing is lost, if it was ever had. Homeless, with finances dwindling a new fear arises, the fear of sheer survival. Turning to disability benefits, with cases dragging on for years without a penny, the patient struggles to do odd jobs, getting fired over and over due to poor health and becomes sicker. Money dwindles; starvation becomes a friend; sleeping in the streets is imminent. Instead of eating, any money found is saved for medication required to sustain remaining life. Now, that is almost gone. Research has shown that suicide rates are high among MCSers. But is it really suicide, or does societal and familial ignorance and denial kill MCS patients off, patients that could be self-sufficient and contribute to society with minor accommodation and a little bit of understanding?

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