**Self- Help Group Module**

Authors: Catherine Jacobs and Audrey Osinski

**Concepts/Focus:** This module provides background information about self-help groups; considerations for scholars when attending self-help groups; reflecting on experiences and potential impact on future clinical practice

**Complexity Level**: 1 (low complexity)

**Time Frame:** Year 1 of MS STEP UP program. It is recommended that scholars work through basic information on MS (as in the Intro Module) before attending self-help groups; topics such as medications, types of MS, symptoms, etc, may be discussed at meetings.

**Learning Objectives:** At the completion of this module, students will be able to:

1. Understand the potential use and benefit of a self-help group.

2. Connect to local self-help groups.

3. Confidently discuss the potential benefits of self-help groups to patients.

4. Reflect on their experience and incorporate what they have learned into their future interactions as a student and therapist.

Part A- Background Information on Self-Help Groups

While discussion posts are not required for this part of the module, scholars are encourage to write down their thoughts and revisit those after reading associated articles and visiting a self-help group.

Before starting any readings, consider the following:

* What type of person might be interested in attending a self-help group?
* What benefits do you think might attract a person to participate in a self-help group?
* What type of person might be more reluctant to go to a self-help group?
* What are potential obstacles or barriers that may prevent people from attending?
* Why might it be a valuable experience for you as a student to attend a self-help group? What do you expect to learn from this experience?

Required Readings:

1. Information from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society regarding Self-Help Groups <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/chapters/ncp/programs--services/family-support/self-help-groups/index.aspx>
2. Finlayson ML, Cho CC. A profile of support group use and need among middle-aged and older adults with multiple sclerosis. *J Gerontol Soc Work*. 2011;54(5):475-493. doi: 10.1080/01634372.2011.575446; 10.1080/01634372.2011.575446.

Optional Readings: While the follow are not required, they still have good information relating to self-help groups.

1. Holmes JM, Ford E, Yuill F, Drummond AE, Lincoln NB. Attendance at a psychological support group for people with multiple sclerosis and low mood. *Disabil Rehabil*. 2012;34(15):1323-1327. doi: 10.3109/09638288.2011.642927; 10.3109/09638288.2011.642927.
2. Messmer Uccelli M, Mancuso Mohr L, Battaglia MA, Zagami P, Mohr DC. Peer support groups in multiple sclerosis: Current effectiveness and future directions. *Mult Scler*. 2004;10(1):80-84.
3. Peters TJ, Somerset M, Campbell R, Sharp DJ. Variables associated with attendance at, and the perceived helpfulness of, meetings for people with multiple sclerosis. *Health Soc Care Community*. 2003;11(1):19-26.

Part B- Attending a Self-Help Group Meeting

* View attached document with listings of local self-help groups. These lists have been provided by the Greater Carolinas Chapter as well as the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.
* Choose a group.
* Contact the group leaders in advance to make sure they are open to visitors and let them know when they can expect your attendance.
* At the meeting:
	+ You will find that these groups will all be different- observe who attends, what they share with each other, just the overall “feel” of the meeting. Does this group target a specific population (for example newly diagnosed groups, singles groups, religious groups, groups involving family or caregivers).
	+ It is recommended that as a first year scholar you introduce yourself and the MS STEP UP program at UNC initially, but then allow the group to carry on as they would like. Some groups may involve you in their discussions more than others, but no matter what, you will be learning from what you observe. As you progress in the program, these groups may benefit from presentations MS STEP UP scholar share with them, but at this point we are really learning from them!
* After the meeting you will write a reflection, so keep the following in mind during your visit:
	+ Group dynamics/characteristics- topics discussed, gender, age, number of participants, level of disability
	+ Reactions to your introduction- for example: do people share experiences about PT, have they heard about MS STEP UP, etc?
	+ Is there a difference in discussions, moods, etc, in this setting in comparison to a clinical setting (at a PT appointment, at the neurologist).

Reflection:

Attending a self-help group meeting can be different than interactions in a clinical setting. It is important for you to reflect on what you have experienced in order to realize what you have learned. After attending a meeting (or 2 or 3!), please post to the discussion board your thoughts on the following (bullet points are acceptable).

* What lessons can MS STEP UP scholars learn from visiting a self-help group as an “outsider”?
* Would you recommend self-help groups to your patients? If your answer for all your patients is yes, why? If it is certain patients, expand upon who and why/why not? If your answer is no, why not? Are there other resources you know of that you could direct patients to (besides self-help groups).
* How do you feel knowing you could be working as a new clinician with people who have been living with MS for many years? (How might your interactions change with someone who is newly diagnosed vs. someone who has been living with MS for many years?)
* Have you recognized any important psychosocial considerations? How can you incorporate this aspect into your therapy?
* Think back to your original responses to the questions in Part A. Has anything changed?
* Feel free to share any other thoughts, questions, etc!