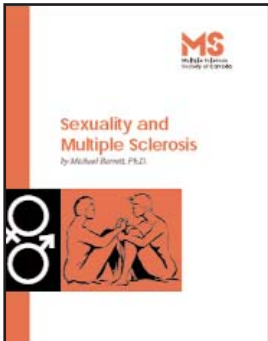


## Some ideas for communicating about sexual concerns



The following is an excerpt from the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada's publication called *Sexuality and Multiple Sclerosis* written by Michael Barrett, Ph.D. To obtain a copy, please contact the Toronto Chapter at 416-922-6065.

Masters et al (1986) describe three main reasons for lack of clarity in communication about sex. First, we don't always say what we mean for fear of hurting someone we care about. Second, we send mixed messages with a contradiction either in what we say or in our tone of voice or non-verbal signals. Third, we are not specific. The comment "Our sex life seems to be a low priority lately" may raise rather than invite questions (my fault? is she unhappy? is our relationship in trouble? what does he want?).

Here are several suggestions for enhancing clarity in communication about sex (Masters et al, 1986; Brenton, 1973).

1. Think through what you want to say and find out from your partner when he or she would be most comfortable talking. Right after an unsatisfying encounter ("instant replay") may not be the best time for some but OK for others.
2. Be clear about your priorities. Keep it brief with a few points that come from your own

feelings (use "I" language) and do not start with criticism or accusation. The statement "You seem in a hurry to have intercourse without thinking about my enjoyment" may be less engaging than "I'd like to spend more time kissing and caressing before we have intercourse." Therapist Stephen Treat (1987) points out that some "I" messages are really disguised criticisms ("I feel that you don't really care how I feel") while others express genuine vulnerability ("I feel close to you"; "I feel hurt").

3. Asking for variety in a sexual interaction or for new activities can make us feel insecure ("Perhaps I'll be rejected or considered kinky"). Don't use persuasion. Don't become accusatory. Remember that a "no" does not mean rejection of you as a person.
4. Don't talk at your partner. Allow a chance

▶ Story continues on page 5

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## Living with MS

# Acceptance of sexual identity comes from within

Michelle Amerie, diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when she was 20, says her biggest obstacle to coming to terms with her changing body and accepting her sexual identity came from within.

"It was harder for me to accept that I was someone that someone could see in that way."

The turning point for Michelle came when she realized that she "didn't want to sit at home," she says, and that she had control over her life. She started to take pride in getting ready to go out and "putting herself out there."

When she was single, Michelle says she met the odd person who would say things like, "She's fantastic, it's too bad about..." So she started to pursue people whom her disability didn't make a difference to.

Now, Michelle has been with her husband for 15 years and describes their relationship as loving, supportive and happy.

She met her husband when she sold him carnations as a volunteer with the MS Society of Canada, Ontario Division's volunteer program.

But Michelle says she had to come out of a period where she shut herself out of social situations.

"It doesn't work until you take pride in your own sexuality."

Michelle adds that she was careful not to blame her MS for relationship problems, which can happen in any situation, or settle for any relationship because she has MS.

She adds that there was a period when she was first experiencing physical changes that she didn't date much because she realized she first had to go through the stages of acceptance.

"I realized, I can't figure this out for me, how can I expect someone else to figure it out?"

For those requiring additional support, programs such as SexAbility at Anne Johnston Health Station, help participants to rediscover the sexual side of themselves, says volunteer peer facilitator, Heather Maybee.

SexAbility offers presentations to groups and also has a support group called Dine and Discuss, which generally features a light dinner and then a chance for participants to discuss a pre-determined topic.

"It's a chance for people to meet other people living with a disability and struggling with the same issues," Heather says. "It helps them to see that it is possible to have relationships." ♦

Would you like to contribute to MSToronto?  
Please contact Julie at 416-967-3046 or  
[julie.crljen@mssociety.ca](mailto:julie.crljen@mssociety.ca).

A round of applause please...

## for Toronto Chapter volunteers!

Call Julie to ask about current opportunities 416-967-3046



## Chapter Events

# The Toronto Chapter Presents...

## East York Book Club



**Planning meeting**

**August 18, 2009**

**10:30 a.m.**

**S. Walter Stewart Library**

**Call Angela for details, 416-967-3034**

**angela.rodriguez@mssociety.ca**

**Official start on September 15, 2009.**

**Will meet every third Tuesday of each month from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**



## FALL EDUCATION EVENTS

### Parenting with MS

Saturday, October 24, 2009 • Willowdale Ave./Cummer Ave.

Presenter from the Parenting Education Network

Geared to parents with children under 18 years.

**MORE DETAILS TO FOLLOW SOON**

### Employment series

Six-week program co-hosted by the Toronto Chapter and Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario (CPA) .

**Sept. 21**.....Personality Dimensions (\$10 materials fee)

**Oct. 5**..... Legal and Human Resources Issues

**Oct. 19**..... Disclosure/Duty to Accommodation

**Nov. 2**..... Fatigue/Stress/Bladder Management and Assistive Devices

**Nov. 16**..... Insurance

**Nov. 30**..... Closing, presentations from CPA and MS Society

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Bloor St. / Church St.

## Event Registration

If you would like to register for an event, please contact the chapter by telephone, e-mail or by using our online form.

 **Telephone**

416-922-6600 x.2501

 **E-mail**

torontoevents@mssociety.ca

 **Online**

www.mssociety.ca/toronto  
(Click on “Events”)

### Support Groups

12 Step MS Support Group

The CHAT ROOM: For Women with MS

Family Support Group

East End Women’s Wellness Group

Etobicoke MS Group

VIVA (*Persons with MS and family members*)

### Start-up Support Groups

GLAMS (*Gay and lesbian*)

Iranian Support Group

Downtown Group

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## Special Report

# Volunteer Appreciation 2009:

## “You take the cake, volunteer!”



*Volunteer of the Year, Vida Sandler (left) accepts a gift from Julie Crljen (right), manager of communications and volunteers.*

Toronto Chapter volunteers gathered at the Granite Brewery on May 22. The event's theme was “You take the cake, volunteer!”

The Granite Brewery provided a delicious and plentiful buffet lunch for the group. Each volunteer received a certificate and participated in raffles for door prizes.

Vida Sandler was presented with a gift as the Volunteer of the Year. Vida has run our family support group for two years and continues to do so, even after the

death of her husband last year. Angela Rodriguez, manager of client services, made a lovely speech about Vida.

As always, we thank all of our volunteers for their invaluable contributions to the work of the chapter. ♦

**Thanks to our sponsors: The Keg Restaurants Ltd, Winners HomeSense, Harmony Printing Limited and DMZ Printing Services**

## The chapter goes paperless

Those who wish can receive all Toronto Chapter newsletters and flyers by e-mail instead of regular mail. Many Toronto Chapter members have already registered.

If you would like to receive the newsletter and events flyers by e-mail only, please call Julie at 416-967-3046 or e-mail [julie.crljen@mssociety.ca](mailto:julie.crljen@mssociety.ca).

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[info@abilityhealthcare.ca](mailto:info@abilityhealthcare.ca)

◀ *Story continued from page 1*

## Communicating about sex..

to respond. When you do respond, don't ridicule, refuse to discuss it, or make your partner feel guilty for asking.

5. Don't try to talk when you are angry, have had too much to drink, or have too little time or privacy.

6. If you want a different kind of stroking or caressing, actually showing a partner may be easier than describing it in words, then he or she doesn't have to guess.

7. Don't expect perfection. Here's how Masters et al (1986) describe it:

"Intimate relations can stumble if partners expect that sex should always be a memorable, passionate experience. Realize that just as your mood can change, or your physical feelings ebb and flow, so too can sexual experiences range from ecstatic peaks to fizzled out fiascos. It isn't necessary to analyze what went wrong whenever sex isn't superlative. Instead, it's useful to talk with your partner to be sure that you both have realistic expectations about sex, rather than impossible dreams that can only lead to disappointment."♦



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## Resources

**Come As You Are**  
701 Queen St. W.  
[www.comeasyouare.com](http://www.comeasyouare.com)  
(Click on "Sex & Disability" for links)

**Sexual Health Clinics**  
416-392-2437  
[www.toronto.ca/health/sexualhealth](http://www.toronto.ca/health/sexualhealth)

**SexAbility**  
Anne Johnston Health Station  
416-486-8666 ext.248  
[www.ajhs.ca/program-SexAbility.htm](http://www.ajhs.ca/program-SexAbility.htm)

**Springtide Resources**  
Abuse resources  
416-968-3422  
[www.springtideresources.org](http://www.springtideresources.org)

**Distress Centres of Toronto**  
416-408-HELP (4357)  
[www.torontodistresscentre.com](http://www.torontodistresscentre.com)

**Canadian Federation for Sexual Health**  
[www.cfsh.ca](http://www.cfsh.ca)

**Planned Parenthood Toronto**  
36B Prince Arthur Ave.  
416-961-0113  
[www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)  
[ppt@ppt.on.ca](mailto:ppt@ppt.on.ca)

**Sexuality and U**  
[www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)

**Sex Therapy - Wasser Pain Management Centre**  
Mt. Sinai Hospital  
416-586-4800 ext. 2760  
[www.mtsinai.on.ca/wasser/SexTherapy/](http://www.mtsinai.on.ca/wasser/SexTherapy/)

## Donations

**April 16-09 to June-15-09**

**Memberships**

\$1,473

**Donations, General**

\$2,485

**Commemorative Giving**

\$7,247

**Gifts in Kind**

\$6,114

**United Way Toronto,**

**Donor's Choice**

\$17,309

### Thank you donors!

Your contributions help to provide services to individuals and families, including educational, social and financial programs.

### A reminder

If you would like to donate to Toronto Chapter programs & services, please make your cheque payable to:

*Toronto Chapter, MS Society*

and address it to the attention of Patricia Cole. Thank you!

### Special Report

## Equipment available from the Toronto Chapter

The Toronto Chapter has the following equipment available for long-term loan:

Rollators/walkers

Manual/power wheelchairs

Scooters

Hospital beds

Stairglides

Bath equipment

To find out how to access any of these items, please contact Nancy by telephone at 416-967-3033 or by e-mail at [nancy.torrance@mssociety.ca](mailto:nancy.torrance@mssociety.ca). ♦

### Special Report

## Air conditioners available



Need an air conditioner to help manage your MS in the summer months? Do you have an air conditioner in good working order that you would like to donate? Contact Nancy at 416-967-3033 or [nancy.torrance@mssociety.ca](mailto:nancy.torrance@mssociety.ca). ♦

### Commemorative Giving

The gift that helps to improve the quality of life for people with MS

**Birthdays ♦ Anniversaries  
♦ Memoriams ♦ Bar  
mitzvahs & bat mitzvahs ♦  
Wedding favours...and more**

Contact Patricia Cole at 416-967-3036 or [patricia.cole@mssociety.ca](mailto:patricia.cole@mssociety.ca), or visit [www.mssociety.ca/toronto/help.htm](http://www.mssociety.ca/toronto/help.htm)

## Special Report

# Meet the board: Deborah Worrad



Deborah  
Worrad

**I**n addition to being a chartered director trained in all aspects of board work, Deborah Worrad brings her knowledge of multiple sclerosis and massage therapy treatment for clients with MS to the Toronto Chapter board. She says she has seen the effects of MS, with family members and friends living with the disease.

"I know how important the supportive services provided by the MS Society are to them," Deborah says. "I believed that with my skills and experience I could bring some value to the Toronto Chapter Board and assist in moving its agenda forward ."

Deborah has been the registrar and executive director of the College of Massage Therapists of Ontario for 21 years.

In the past, Deborah says she has served on a number of boards. Currently, she is also board chair for the Holistic Health Research Foundation of Canada.

Since joining in November, Deborah has been getting oriented to the board and attending meetings with the other directors.

"I am impressed with the dedication and care my fellow board members bring to their task of leadership and am enjoying becoming part of that team." ♦

## Programs and Services

The MS Society, Toronto Chapter offers the following services:

### Education, Information & Referral

- Bimonthly newsletter, literature, resource room and a website
- Education workshops and specialized courses including MS 101

### Equipment Loans & Equipment Funding

### Subsidies for Home Help & Incontinence Supplies

### Supportive Counselling & Support Groups

### Recreation Programs

### Volunteer Services

### Social Action & Advocacy

[www.mssociety.ca/toronto](http://www.mssociety.ca/toronto)

### Life with MS: A program offered by Toronto Rehab

Toronto Rehab offers a health promotion program for people with MS. Participants learn practical, self-management strategies for day-to-day living in 10 weekly sessions, designed to build confidence and improve well-being. Small groups of about eight to 12 people provide a great opportunity to network and learn how others are coping with MS issues.

For more information or to register, please contact Toronto Rehab's Service Coordinator at 416-597-3422 ext.3441.

## Members Helping Members

# Decrease of drive is common with MS

by Louise Giroux

*Dear Louise,*

*I am a male whose MS has been progressing more rapidly for a few years. My partner and I have always had a regular sex life, but as my body changes so does my drive – I have noticed a decrease in my desire. Is this common and what can I do about it?*

*Signed,*

*Concerned*

Dear Concerned,

Low sex drive is a common issue in life with multiple sclerosis. To each individual, it is a major issue, since it hammers home the loss of one's former life.

The causes of lowered libido are physical and psychological. Certain medication, exhaustion and fear of incontinence are just a few of the physical contributors to low sex drive. Depression, stress, the harsh reality that you may not feel like a man anymore due to your limitations, all plot against your sex life.

All of these apply to your partner as well, who has losses of her own. MS shifts life around. As for remedies, there are medications to enhance your performance, but none to heighten your libido, which is an area of mental health.

Sometimes, accommodating MS, like planning for sexual encounters, seems to help. As you well know, with MS, spontaneity is one major loss. Having lost your sex drive as it was, is very painful; that you are angry or sad about it, is most understandable, if not to be expected.

I know that there is no magic relief from this situation, but rest assured, that just like in the other areas of life with MS, you can find a peaceful resolve. You are reaching out, and that is the first step. Further, in my therapy practice, I see many couples without MS complain about low libido, so it's a problem beyond MS also.

I leave you with hope for renewed courage to face MS and to make the changes. ♦

*Louise Giroux, PhD, (C) OACCPP, is a practicing therapist who lives with MS.*

## MS Toronto

Chair: Colin Rickards  
Co-Acting Executive Directors:  
Angela Rodriguez  
Lynn Laccohee  
Editor: Julie Crljen

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Website: [www.mssociety.ca/toronto](http://www.mssociety.ca/toronto)

### MS Society of Canada Mission

To be a leader in finding a cure for multiple sclerosis and enabling people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life.

### Toronto Chapter Vision

To maximize the quality of life for persons with MS and their support network living in Toronto Chapter's geographic boundaries.

The opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of MS Toronto and of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. Articles on products and services are for information only and are not meant to be seen as endorsements.



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