



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**

**MS Learn Online
Feature Presentation
Employment Planning when Living with Primary-Progressive MS
Nicholas LaRocca, PhD**

Tom>> Hello, I'm Tom Kimball

Tracey>> and I'm Tracey Kimball. Welcome to MS Learn Online. There's no doubt about it, if you've been diagnosed with primary progressive MS, it will play a major role in every aspect of your life. For many of us employment may be a large part of our lives.

Tom>> So how do you handle employment issues if you find yourself with the diagnosis of primary progressive MS? The National Multiple Sclerosis Society's Dr. Nicholas LaRocca explains that it begins with planning.

>>**Nick LaRocca:** When someone is diagnosed with primary-progressive MS, they should really begin their planning right away. And, in fact, they should have been planning before that. We should all be planning, doing financial planning, but we don't do that because we get busy with other things.

When someone is diagnosed primary-progressive MS, that really kind of raises the ante quite a bit, and it's much more important to begin planning. And there are a variety of things that people can and should do. Number one, if they are employed, if they have an employer who has a good

benefits package, they should make sure that they are plugged into the benefits that may be important to them in the future, particularly the health plan, particularly if there is a long-term disability option. Very often that's an extra pay option. They should think about that.

If there's a retirement plan and they haven't been contributing, they should think about beginning to contribute to that plan so that they have a little nest egg and hopefully they won't need it until retirement age. But if they need it beforehand, they can -- they will be able to access it.

They should also begin to think about the job in general, and what the demands of the job are. And the more or less attitude that we sort of suggest that people adopt is to plan for the worst and to hope for the best.

And so to kind of look at the job, what are the demands of the job, both in terms of getting to the workplace and in terms of the duties of the job. If there are a lot of physical demands to the job, if it's a really wild and hectic schedule. Any of the things that might run up against some of the things that can occur in primary-progressive MS, like difficulty walking, fatigue, and so on.

To maybe think about what they would do if they had to change the type of job they're doing either within the same company or if they had to go out and perhaps find a different career. To really give that some thought before it becomes a problem, before it becomes a crisis.

The other thing that they should think about is if they haven't taken advantage of some of the technology that's available today, to become more familiar with technology. Studies have shown that people with MS, particularly primary-progressive MS, tend to make great use of technology, to stay connected with people, to stay connected with work, to learn about MS, to learn about treatments for MS. And also to help them stay employed. We live in a culture now where computer skills are very important, even in some types of work where they never were. So, learning about technology can be very important.

And, also, for some people the demands of getting to work and maintaining a standard schedule may be too difficult, and perhaps working at home or working in your own business can be an option. And in those cases, knowing about the technology that's available can be very valuable, because there are lots of things that people can do at home using the technology that we have, computers and broadband access, and so forth.

So, I think there are a lot of things that people can think about to try and anticipate some of the changes that might occur. If those changes don't occur, so much the better. But at least they've had a chance, when they have time and they have opportunity to search options, to really think things through and maybe come up with some contingency plans.

Tom>> Having contingency plans in place can really make a difference. As with any long-term planning, they often say, “Hope for the best, but plan for the worst.” That’s particularly true if you’re living with primary-progressive MS.

Tracey>> Thank you, Dr. LaRocca for your valuable tips on employment planning. If you’d like to learn more about this important topic, click on the resources link below.

Tom>> And thanks for joining us.