

MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY DISORDER



Health

What is Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Disorder?

In 2010, the National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS) and the Office of Chemical Safety and Environmental Health conducted a review of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity¹. It stated that¹:

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is a term used to describe a condition presenting as a complex array of symptoms linked to low level exposure to chemicals. There is uncertainty about the event(s) and the underlying biological mechanisms that lead to symptoms. This uncertainty has hampered the development of a clinical basis for the diagnosis and treatment of individuals with MCS. Those with MCS often face situations where their symptoms may be poorly understood or mis-diagnosed, and may be provided with health care that is less than optimal. Difficulties with the diagnosis of MCS are accompanied by a lack of consensus for its treatment other than avoidance of agents that may trigger symptoms.

MCS, Health Facilities and the Human Rights Commission

The Human Rights Commission² advises that:

A growing number of people report being affected by sensitivity to chemicals used in the building, maintenance and operation of premises. This can mean that premises are effectively inaccessible to people with chemical sensitivity. People who own, lease, operate and manage premises should consider the following issues to eliminate or minimise chemical sensitivity reactions in users:

- the selection of building, cleaning and maintenance chemicals and materials
- the provision of adequate ventilation and ensuring all fresh air intakes are clear of possible sources of pollution such as exhaust fumes from garages;
- minimising use of air fresheners and pesticides;
- the provision of early notification of events such as painting, pesticide applications or carpet shampooing by way of signs, memos or e-mail.

NSW Health

PD2013_050 Work Health and Safety: Better Practice Procedures provides a framework for implementation of the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act 2011 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 in all NSW Health Agencies. The Act and Regulation require NSW Health Agencies to take all reasonably practicable actions to ensure the health and safety of workers and ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of other persons when they are visiting the workplace (eg. patients, hospital visitors).

Reasonable accommodations should be made to support people who identify as having MCS and who have a treatment plan by a registered medical practitioner when they attend NSW Health facilities.

NSW Health PD2008_010 *Disability - People with a Disability: Responding to Needs During Hospitalisation* outlines steps that health practitioners and facilities can take to prepare for an admission for a patient who identifies as having a disability. Given the lack of evidence regarding the efficacy of treatment for this disorder and the lack of evidence of efficacy of other interventions, individual patient needs must be balanced against the health and safety of staff and other patients.

¹National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS) and the Office of Chemical Safety and Environmental Health (OCSEH) A SCIENTIFIC REVIEW OF MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY: IDENTIFYING KEY RESEARCH NEEDS (2010) accessed online at http://www.nicnas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/4946/MCS_Final_Report_Nov_2010_PDF.pdf

²Australian Human Rights Commission Access: Guidelines and information (April 2008) accessed online at: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/access-guidelines-and-information#chem>