# UK neurology services face escalating delays risking preventable disability for MS patients



When Pippa Dungey first experienced numbness in her legs, she sought help from her GP, only to be told that specialist neurology services would not be available for 10 months. The 25-year-old trainee solicitor from southeast London watched anxiously as her condition deteriorated, later developing such severe weakness that she was unable to lift her right leg and had to drag it around. Despite repeated visits to her GP and A&E, she was repeatedly advised to wait for a neurology appointment. Eventually, she was admitted to hospital for a week and diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), a progressive neurological condition affecting around 150,000 people in the UK. Ms Dungey continues to work on regaining mobility but describes feeling abandoned during the critical early phase of her illness.

Her experience starkly highlights a growing crisis in neurology services across the NHS, where patients endure prolonged waits for diagnosis and treatment. According to the MS Society, waiting times for initial neurology appointments have surged by 65% since 2019-20, now averaging five months. Over 6,000 people have waited more than a year for neurology consultations, with more than 220,000 neurology pathways active as of 2025 and almost half of these patients waiting longer than the 18-week NHS target. The charity warns that delays can lead to irreversible disability due to untreated disease progression and have criticised the government for failing to include neurological conditions in its 10-year NHS plan.

The shortage of neurologists exacerbates these pressures. The MS Trust points to regional disparities and a national lack of consultant neurologists amid rising demand. The pandemic further intensified waiting lists, as revealed in a 2021 MS Society report showing that nearly a third of MS patients had experienced cancelled or postponed appointments, while 63% of neurology professionals struggled to maintain care quality. The House of Lords debate in 2022 noted a sharp increase in neurology referrals and called for streamlined referral pathways to alleviate bottlenecks, a call echoed by charities advocating for a dedicated national strategy.

Data from Parliament confirms that patient pathways awaiting neurology care numbered over 220,000 in early 2025, reflecting the significant systemic challenges. The MS Society has also highlighted that about one in seven MS patients suffer unplanned hospital admissions, often preventable with timely care, and some must travel over 20 miles for treatment amid limited local resources. Peter Lloyd, policy manager at the MS Society, warned that neurologists and specialist MS nurses are under immense strain, causing detrimental delays for essential services such as diagnosis and follow-up care. He confirmed that while the NHS 10-Year Plan addresses some issues like shifting care into community settings, it lacks a specific focus on neurological conditions, underscoring the urgent need for a dedicated national neurology plan.

Ms Dungey’s sobering story and the mounting evidence from patient surveys, parliamentary data, and charity reports collectively expose the fragility of neurology services in the UK. Thousands of people with MS and other neurological conditions face life-altering delays that risk preventable disability and emergency hospital admissions. Although government plans profess ambition, the absence of explicit commitments to neurological care continuity and resource expansion remains a serious concern for those reliant on timely specialist intervention.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/ms-neurology-a-e-nhs-waiting-times-b2818414.html), [[4]](https://mstrust.org.uk/information-support/ms-symptoms-diagnosis/waiting-neurologist-appointment)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/ms-neurology-a-e-nhs-waiting-times-b2818414.html), [[2]](https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/question/59660/multiple-sclerosis-diagnosis), [[3]](https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/question/42371/multiple-sclerosis-diagnosis), [[6]](https://www.mssociety.org.uk/research/news/new-report-shows-neurology-services-failing-people-ms), [[7]](https://www.mssociety.org.uk/research/news/what-does-nhs-10-year-plan-mean-people-ms)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://mstrust.org.uk/information-support/ms-symptoms-diagnosis/waiting-neurologist-appointment), [[5]](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2022-06-09/debates/B6CB63B1-B491-4A14-B4EF-E6D382CEF6E8/NeurologicalConditions), [[6]](https://www.mssociety.org.uk/research/news/new-report-shows-neurology-services-failing-people-ms)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/question/59660/multiple-sclerosis-diagnosis), [[3]](https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/question/42371/multiple-sclerosis-diagnosis), [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/ms-neurology-a-e-nhs-waiting-times-b2818414.html), [[6]](https://www.mssociety.org.uk/research/news/new-report-shows-neurology-services-failing-people-ms)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/ms-neurology-a-e-nhs-waiting-times-b2818414.html), [[6]](https://www.mssociety.org.uk/research/news/new-report-shows-neurology-services-failing-people-ms), [[7]](https://www.mssociety.org.uk/research/news/what-does-nhs-10-year-plan-mean-people-ms)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/ms-neurology-a-e-nhs-waiting-times-b2818414.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/question/59660/multiple-sclerosis-diagnosis> - In June 2025, Sarah Gibson, a Liberal Democrat MP, inquired about the average waiting time from initial referral to diagnosis for multiple sclerosis (MS) in each NHS region. The Department of Health and Social Care responded in July 2025, stating that while specific data was not available, as of April 2025, there were 223,699 pathways waiting for a neurology appointment, with 53.8% waiting 18 weeks or less. This highlights the significant demand and waiting times for neurology services in the UK.
3. <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/question/42371/multiple-sclerosis-diagnosis> - In March 2025, Markus Campbell-Savours, a Labour MP, asked about the average time taken to diagnose multiple sclerosis over the past five years. The Department of Health and Social Care replied in April 2025, noting that while specific data was unavailable, as of January 2025, there were under 233,000 pathways waiting for a neurology appointment, with 53.8% waiting less than 18 weeks. This underscores the challenges in timely diagnosis and treatment for MS patients.
4. <https://mstrust.org.uk/information-support/ms-symptoms-diagnosis/waiting-neurologist-appointment> - The MS Trust discusses the variability in waiting times for neurology appointments across the UK, influenced by factors such as regional differences and the availability of specialist neurologists. They highlight that the UK faces a shortage of consultant neurologists, with one in six people estimated to have a neurological condition. The pandemic has further exacerbated waiting lists, making it essential for patients to check current neurology waiting times for their local hospitals on the NHS My Planned Care website.
5. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2022-06-09/debates/B6CB63B1-B491-4A14-B4EF-E6D382CEF6E8/NeurologicalConditions> - In June 2022, a debate in the House of Lords highlighted the rising number of people waiting for neurology appointments on the NHS, increasing from 120,000 to 180,000 in the year leading up to March 2022. Approximately 37% of these patients were waiting more than 18 weeks. The Migraine Trust called for streamlined referral pathways to specialist clinics to reduce these waiting times, emphasizing the urgent need for improved access to neurological care.
6. <https://www.mssociety.org.uk/research/news/new-report-shows-neurology-services-failing-people-ms> - In October 2021, the MS Society released a report revealing that nearly 29% of people with MS had appointments cancelled or delayed during the pandemic. Additionally, 63% of MS professionals found it very challenging to provide quality service to all patients. The report emphasized the critical need for increased funding and support for neurology services to prevent further deterioration in care quality for individuals with MS.
7. <https://www.mssociety.org.uk/research/news/what-does-nhs-10-year-plan-mean-people-ms> - In July 2025, the MS Society evaluated the NHS 10-Year Health Plan, noting its commitment to shifting more care into the community and focusing on prevention. While these goals are promising, the MS Society expressed concerns about the plan's implementation, given existing pressures on the NHS. They called for a dedicated delivery plan for neurology services to ensure real improvements for people with MS.