

10-09-03 – G & M – MS Linked to seasons

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MS linked to seasons

A new study suggests that multiple sclerosis patients are more likely to experience a flare-up of their condition during spring and summer than at other times of the year. The findings, published in the journal *Neurology*, are based on an analysis of MRI brain scans conducted on 44 MS patients who lived in the Boston area. Each patient received an average of 22 scans over the period of a year. The data were collected in the early 1990s, before the introduction of new drugs that can alter the natural course of the disease.

The researchers charted MS activity by observing the changing number of brain lesions, which show up as bright spots on the MRI scans. “We found dramatically higher activity in the warmer part of the year – the spring and summer – compared to the fall and winter,” said the study’s lead author, Dominik Meier of Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston.

The researchers aren’t sure why MS activity seems to change with the seasons. And Dr. Meier cautioned that the research relies on a fairly small sample of patients. The results need to be confirmed with much larger studies.

Even so, an editorial accompanying the study says the conclusions should be taken into account by researchers who are planning to do studies on new MS treatments. If a study ran from spring to winter, it may appear that lesions decreased due to the treatment when the improvement may have been the result of a change in seasons.

Long-term trials are needed to properly evaluate any therapy. And that is certainly worth keeping in mind when considering the current controversy over “liberation therapy” pioneered by Italian doctor Paolo Zamboni, who says MS can be treated with an operation that improves blood flow from the brain.
