

There's not just one solution to *overcoming pain*. You always have to be *searching* for a better *quality of life*.

Dr. Maria Adelita Reyes-Velarde's philosophy about living with the pain associated with multiple sclerosis (MS) is to keep moving. A native of Puerto Rico, Reyes-Velarde, MD, PhD is the director of multicultural and clinical initiatives for the New York office of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

"I don't like the word 'limit.' I never want to limit myself and never have. However, I have learned how much I can do without hurting. That is an important thing to understand," says Dr. Reyes-Velarde.

To help reduce the pain and exhaustion of MS, Reyes-Velarde works from home one day a week. She says that working for an organization that understands her needs and allows a flexible work schedule is a blessing.

As director of multicultural and clinical initiatives, she develops MS education and outreach programs for special populations and ensures that the organization operates in "culturally and linguistically appropriate" ways. Dr. Reyes-Velarde has written a book about multiple sclerosis in Spanish to promote awareness in Spanish-speaking populations.

Although Reyes-Velarde's symptoms first appeared when she was 13, a formal diagno-



*Dr. Maria Adelita
Reyes-Velarde*
LIVING WITH
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

sis was not made until 2000. Her diagnosis prompted her to return to school and earn a master's degree in public health from George Washington University.

Pain has become part of daily life for Dr. Reyes-Velarde. She first developed pain in her arm, leg and face and has gradually learned to live with a certain degree of constant pain. Over time, new pains or exacerbated pain in the same regions evolve into a new pain baseline.

"My pain may increase, decrease or set a new

baseline. I never know. It can drive you crazy and you think you are going to go wild with it," says Dr. Reyes-Velarde.

To help stimulate pain release, Reyes-Velarde, who never previously considered herself athletic, began practicing yoga. Soon, yoga became instrumental in reducing her pain and increasing her range of motion. But her greatest and most loved source of therapy is gardening.

"I go out and talk to my plants and to my trees. Gardening gives me exercise without even knowing it," she says.

Two years ago, Reyes-Velarde suffered spasms that required physical therapy. She found herself screaming in pain and even annoyed at the exercises that her therapist recommended.

"And then I sat on my little chair in my garden, began to wheel myself around and started to move. I realized that the exercises he made me do were the things I was doing in my garden all along. I was exercising without realizing it," she recounts.

MS has given Dr. Reyes-Velarde a new perspective on pain and life and has led her to a career where she can share her experiences with others who know her path so well.