

Distinguishing neurological diseases from primary psychiatric disorders: new insights from a cohort of neurological diseases presenting as a psychiatric disorder.

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State of the art

Distinguishing primary psychiatric disorders and neurological diseases remains a clinical challenge, in which atypical symptoms can play a key role.

Methods

We retrospectively built a cohort of patients with neurological diseases presenting as psychiatric disorders. We comprehensively reviewed clinical and neuropsychological descriptions looking for atypical symptoms.

We reviewed all the medical files from the Rouen University Hospital between 2000 and 2020 based on keywords including the main psychiatric disorders associated with “lumbar puncture”.

Results

Based on this query, we only included the patients meeting a probable neurological diagnosis, and presenting at the onset with a psychiatric disorder (13 patients out of 197).

The most common diagnoses were FTD (3) and Alzheimer’s disease (3), Lewy Body disease (2), an inborn error of metabolisms (2), autoimmune encephalitis (1), and other neurodegenerative diseases (2).

The most usual atypical psychiatric symptoms were: familial history of neuropsychiatric disease, late-onset psychiatric symptomatology, parkinsonism, frontal symptoms (including social cognition deficit), psychotropic drug intolerance, or resistance. Delay from the onset of the psychiatric symptoms and the neurological diagnosis was long (mean time from onset to lumbar puncture: 17.7 months).

Conclusion

Neurological diseases presenting as psychiatric disorders concern mainly neurodegenerative diseases, especially FTD. Distinguishing FTD vs PPD can be difficult and needs a good neurologist-psychiatrist collaboration. Labeling the frontal syndrome both through the clinical and neuropsychological description might be of great help in order to perform quicker diagnoses. It can thus prevent psychotropic drug intensification often badly tolerated.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this publication