LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Facial diplegia with paraesthesias: facial nerve enhancement in three dimensional MRI

Facial diplegia (bilateral facial paralysis) is a rare clinical finding that can be the presenting symptom in a wide range of diseases. It occurs in about 50% of patients with Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS). Guillain-Barré syndrome causes regional and functional variants with unusual features. Ropper described four patients with facial diplegia and distal limb paraesthesias, and he defined them as having a rare variant form of GBS because of shared clinical, electrophysiological, and CSF features. The aetiology and nosological position of facial diplegia presenting in this variant form is still controversial. We experienced a patient who had bilateral facial paralysis, distal limb paraesthesias, and diminished reflexes whose contrast enhanced three dimensional MRI (3-D MRI) showed enhancing lesions in the bilateral facial nerves. A 27-year-old woman had nasal discharge and coughing. One week later she noticed paraesthesias in her fingers and toes. Nine days after the onset of her neurological symptom, she developed bilateral facial weakness. On admission (day 12) she showed moderate, bilateral facial paralysis that caused her difficulty in moving her forehead, in approximating her eyelids, and in lifting the corners of her mouth and nose. The tongue was wasted and particularly preserved. The other cranial nerves were normal. A motor examination showed normal strength in her limbs. Superficial and deep senses were normal even though she had distal limb paraesthesias. Deep tendon reflexes were absent in all her limbs and her plantar responses were flexor type. Cerebellar ataxia and autonomic nervous dysfunction were excluded. Chest radiography was normal. Laboratory studies of the identifiable causes of facial diplegia (sarcoidosis, Lyme disease, syphilis, infectious mononucleosis, herpes simplex virus, diabetes mellitus, and connective tissue disease) were all negative. On day 12, the CSF examination detected mild increases in protein concentration (57 mg/dl) without pleocytosis. The blink reflex was elicited and both the R1 and R2 components were reduced, but their latencies were not prolonged on day 15. Motor and sensory nerve conduction velocities, and median and ulnar nerve frespanses were all normal on day 18. Auditory brainstem responses were normal. On day 18, when her facial diplegia was moderate, conventional brain MRI detected a lesion in the spinal tracts of the bilateral facial nerve enhancement on three-dimensional MRI with Gd-DTPA. The intracanalicular segments of the bilateral facial nerves were remarkably enhanced by Gd-DTPA (figure). On Day 45, when her symptoms were no longer present, there were no abnormalities of her facial nerves.

After showing symptoms of upper respiratory infection, the patient experienced the acute onset of facial diplegia, distal limb paraesthesias, and areflexia but no other neurological deficits. The CSF examination showed albuminocytological dissociation, and clinical and laboratory examinations excluded the possibility of viral or bacterial infection, Lyme disease, tumour, sarcoidosis, cerebrovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, bilateral Bell’s palsy, and congenital and familial disorders. The patient’s illness followed a monophasic course. We therefore diagnosed this case as having “facial diplegia with paraesthesias”, which should be included for the differential diagnosis whenever sudden bilateral facial paresis occurs. Routine brain MRI showed no abnormalities, whereas contrast enhanced 3-D MRI showed Gd enhancement of the bilateral facial nerves. The MRI findings indicate the involvement of the peripheral facial nerves in our patient. Fulbright et al reported an additional case of GBS with multiple cranial nerve enhancements seen on Gd enhanced MRI. The mechanism of abnormal enhancement of the cranial nerves in the patients with GBS is not entirely understood; however, it is widely regarded as disruption of the blood nerve barrier by the inflammatory infiltrate. Ramsey et al evaluated the MRI findings obtained with Gd contrast enhancement in five patients who had bilateral facial paralysis: GBS (n=1), herpes simplex polyneuritis (n=1), meningeval lymphoma (n=1), and bilateral Bell’s palsy (n=2). Gd enhanced MRI has been shown to be the procedure of choice for demonstrating inflammatory lesions of the facial nerves. Nagaoka et al showed oculomotor nerve enhancement on 3-D MRI in Fisher’s syndrome, the best known variant of GBS. Ours is the first report of facial nerve enhancement in “facial diplegia with paraesthesias”. These findings suggest that 3-D MRI with Gd-DTPA can be used to identify inflammatory conditions that produce peripheral lesion of the cranial nerves in GBS variants.

Restless legs syndrome associated with spinal cord lesions

Restless legs syndrome may be either a primary or a secondary disorder. The primary form of the syndrome is often familial whereas the secondary form is mainly associated with iron deficiency or pregnancy. Almost all patients with restless legs syndrome show periodic leg movements during sleep. The pathogenesis of both restless legs syndrome and periodic leg movements is still speculative. Yokota et al reported an association of periodic leg movements with spinal cord lesions. However, none of these patients had the typical clinical features of restless legs syndrome. Restless legs syndrome associated with myelitis was documented in one patient with a Borrelia induced myelitis. We report three patients who developed a restless legs syndrome in close temporal association with spinal cord lesions.

Case 1 was a 35 year old woman who presented with a 3 week history of painless restlessness of her left lower leg that occurred only at rest, particularly in the evening and at night. The restlessness was partially relieved by walking. With the onset of these symptoms, the patient had noticed a numbness of her left hemibody below the breast. Nine months previously, a numbness of her left leg had subsided spontaneously within 1 week. On examination, the patient had decreased senses for touch, pain, and temperature over the left hemibody below the T6 dermatome. Examination of the left Achilles tendon showed a normal cell count, normal protein content, increased CNS synthesis of IgG, and positive oligoclonal bands. In MRI studies of the spinal cord, no abnormalities were detected. However, a single dose of 100 mg levodopa plus benserazide led to a dramatic improvement of the restless legs syndrome. The levo- dopa treatment was continued and resulted in complete relief.

Case 2 was a 49 year old man who had a traumatic atlantoaxial dislocation that necessitated operative stabilization of the cervical spine. Preoperative MRI studies had shown a compression of the medulla and the cervical cord. When we saw the patient 3 years later, he complained of a sensation of cold, pain, and restlessness in both lower legs that was present only at rest, particularly in the
evening, and was relieved by walking around and rubbing the legs with cold water. The onset of these symptoms was only a few weeks after the accident. Clinical examination disclosed a mild dysarthropathy and atrophic pareses of the left sternomastoid and the left abdominal muscle. Tendon reflexes were hyperactive and plantar responses were extensor bilaterally. The patient's gait was spastic, but he was able to walk unassisted. In both legs, pain and temperature sensation were markedly reduced. The diagnosis of a restless legs syndrome secondary to a traumatic lesion of the medulla and the cervical cord was made. Treatment with 100 mg levdopa plus benzerazine and 100 mg tramadol resulted in satisfactory relief of the restless legs syndrome.

Case 3 was a 65 year old man who developed slowly progressive spastic tetraparesis and ascending sensory disturbances in both legs. An MRI study showed a cervical spondylotic myelopathy at the level C3-C6 and the patient underwent spinal cord decompression. Five years later, he was referred to our hospital because of an intense sensation of restlessness in both legs located in the feet and calves. The restlessness occurred when sitting and lying for more than 20 minutes. It was pronounced at night and improved when he was walking around. The patient had started simultaneously with the motor and sensory disturbances due to the cervical spondylotic myelopathy and did not improve postoperatively. On examination, the patient was mildly impaired in carrying out motor tasks and his gait was moderately spastic. He had reduced touch and vibration senses in both upper limbs. A restless legs syndrome was diagnosed. Treatment with pergolide resulted in an improvement in conscious level, a rise in midposition, non-reactive pupils, brisk, gag absent; no motor response to painful stimuli; plantars equivocal.

In conclusion, our report suggests that restless legs syndrome may occur secondary to spinal cord lesions due to different causative diseases including multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, and cervical spondylotic myelopathy. Similar to idiopathic restless legs syndrome and other secondary forms, restless legs syndrome due to myelopathy may respond well to dopaminergic drugs.

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**Coma in thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura**

Patients with thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (TTP) can present with devastating neurological abnormalities. 1 Mortality may be as high as 95%, but current treatment has reduced this to about 10% and early treatment improves the rate of recovery. We describe two patients who presented with predominantly neurological symptoms and signs who, because of a delay in making a diagnosis of TTP, were referred for treatment at a late stage. Both patients were reviewed by neurologists and haematologists, who considered that the prognosis was poor. The first case was a 49 year old woman with a longstanding diagnosis of schizophrenia and a previous left sided cerebrovascular accident. She was admitted to her local hospital with a 3 day history of drowsiness, confusion, epistaxes, and spontaneous bruising, having been noted to be increasingly agitated and disorientated over the preceding 6 weeks. Her only medication was trifluperazine and paroxetine. The second case was a 58 year old man, previously fit and well, who presented to his local hospital with a 3 week history of confusion, drowsiness, jaundice, and right upper quadrant pain. He was taking no medication. The initial findings in both patients are summarised in the table.

In both a diagnosis of TTP was made, although this was not until 5 days after admission in the first case, and both patients were transferred to the intensive care unit for plasma exchange and further management.

Treatment was started in both cases with five cycles of plasmapheresis, using 31 cryodepleted fresh frozen plasma, and in the first patient this was followed by a course of oral prednisolone and azathioprine.

Both made an excellent recovery, with an improvement in conscious level, a rise in platelet count, disappearance of red cell fragments, a fall in LDH and bilirubin concentrations, and normalisation of renal function. The first patient was self ventilating with no neurological deficit at time of transfer back to the referring hospital. The second patient had a Glasgow coma score of 15 by the fifth day of treatment, the only focal neurology being a bilateral internuclear ophthalmoplegia (INO). Three months later the ophthalmoplegia had resolved and the patient was self caring with minimal disability. Both patients were extensively investigated to look for an underlying cause for TTP, but none was found.

Thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura is a syndrome comprising a pentad of features—fever, thrombocytopenia, microangiopathic haemolytic anaemia, neurological abnormalities, and renal dysfunction. Not all five features are required to make the diagnosis. The presence of one or more of these features has been suggested as fulfilling the requirements for TTP. These criteria were used to diagnose the two patients described.

**Summary of patients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient 1</th>
<th>Patient 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (y)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platelet count (x10⁰/µl)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripheral blood film</td>
<td>RBC fragments +++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clotting screen+fibrogen</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilirubin (µmol/l)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactate dehydrogenase (U/l)</td>
<td>931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creatinine (µmol/l)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow coma score</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurological findings</td>
<td>Pupils equal and reactive, corneal reflexes intact; bilateral jaw jerk, brisk, gag absent; no motor response to painful stimuli; reflexes absent; upgazing plantar responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain CT</td>
<td>Raised ICP, nil else. Normal, although only a scanning MRI was done. A full MRI would have been requested to exclude a midbrain lesion, but was not technically possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain MRI</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
diagnosis—often fewer are present—and there is no pathognomonic test, so diagnosis may be difficult. It is often considered along with haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS) to form part of a range of diseases called the thrombotic microangiopathies. In these disorders, intravascular platelet aggregation (there is minimal fibrin deposition) leads to obstruction of arterioles and capillaries, causing local ischaemia. Thus TTP is seen when the cerebral microcirculation is affected, and HUS when the renal microcirculation is affected. An episode of TTP may present as a one off illness, may be recurring, or may arise in association with drugs, neoplasia, pregnancy, or HIV infection.

Thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura presents with neurological manifestations in over 50% of episodes, with headache, confusion, and somnolence being most common, leading to focal neurological deficit, convulsions, and eventually coma and death. These clinical features are often fleeting and fluctuating and several important points regarding investigation should be made. Firstly, brain CT may be normal or may show multiple hypodense areas indicative of generalised cerebral oedema. Secondly, brain MRI may also be normal, although it is likely to show multiple ischaemic changes on T2 weighted images. Coma has been shown to be a bad prognostic indicator. Of importance is the finding that despite the presence of substantial neurological function, normal findings on brain CT strongly suggest the potential for full clinical recovery. Plasmapheresis is now the treatment of choice: plasma infusion alone should not be regarded as an acceptable alternative but as a short term measure only.

Anaphylactoid reaction to methyl prednisolone developing after starting treatment with interferon β-1b

Courses of intravenous methyl prednisolone are a routine part of therapy for disabled relapses in relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis. The interferon β-1b Multiple Sclerosis Study Group’s research published in 1993 showed that interferon β-1b reduces the frequency of relapse and progression of multiple sclerosis. We present the case of a 35 year old man with multiple sclerosis who became allergic to intravenous methyl prednisolone after the initiation of treatment with interferon β-1b and discuss what part the drug could have played in this.

A 35 year old man with asthma presented early in 1994 with “dizziness”, double vision, and paraesthesia in the right leg extending into the trunk. He had had bilateral pyramidal signs in the legs with extensor plantar responses and gait ataxia. His CSF contained oligoclonal bands. Visual evoked potentials with brain MRI showed multiple periventricular high density lesions with a lesion identified imaging on the cervical cord, all consistent with demyelination. A 3 day course of intravenous methyl prednisolone in May 1994 was associated with improvement in his initial symptoms. Four months later he presented with a Vth nerve palsy which again responded to a 3 day course of intravenous methyl prednisolone. Between September 1995 and February 1996 he had a further four uneventful 3 day courses of intravenous methyl prednisolone for various symptoms related to his multiple sclerosis. In March 1996 he was started on interferon β-1b (8 MIU subcutaneously on alternate days).

In June 1996 he was admitted with pyramidal weakness of the left limbs, altered sensation in the left leg and urgency of micturition. Soon after starting his first dose of intravenous methyl prednisolone he felt a “lump” in his throat, developed an urticarial rash. Again treatment was stopped. Fifteen minutes later the rash had worsened and he felt swelling in his mouth.

His symptoms settled after 10 mg intravenous chlorpheniramine. Further methyl prednisolone was not given. After this episode he chose to stop interferon β-1b. In September 1996 he developed wheeze and a rash after the first dose in a course of intravenous methyl prednisolone. Subsequent doses in that course were preceded by chlorpheniramine. In November 1996 he developed nasal congestion and a rash after 500 mg methyl prednisolone. Again subsequent doses were preceded by a dose of chlorpheniramine. Since then he has been given chlorpheniramine before each dose of intravenous methyl prednisolone, which he has tolerated well.

Allergic reaction to steroids is rare and anaphylactoid reaction to methyl prednisolone is rarer still with only three reports in the literature. One of these reactions occurred in the course of treatment for multiple sclerosis. The allergic reactions are more likely to be to the carrier than to the steroid itself. Pathology in multiple sclerosis is thought to be due to a delayed type hypersensitivity reaction. The mechanism of action of interferon β-1b in multiple sclerosis is unknown, although several mechanisms are postulated. There is evidence that, among its many effects on the immune system, interferon β can increase interleukin-2, and that interleukin-2 can stimulate a Th2 response (found in allergic type responses). These effects would explain the sequence of events in this man. However, evidence suggests that interferon β is more likely to suppress both Th1 (found in delayed type hypersensitivity reactions) and Th2 responses. It remains uncertain whether the sequence of events here is due to an effect of interferon β-1b or to coincidental. However, clinicians should be aware that the complexity of the effects of interferon β-1b on the immune system may lead to unexpected clinical outcomes.

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5 Przy-Philips WEM. Anaphylactoid reaction to methyl prednisolone pulsed for multiple sclerosis Neurology 1984;34:1119-21.

Poststreptococcal neuropathy

Streptococcal infection can lead to a wide range of sequelae. Peripheral nervous system injury is not well known as one of its possible complications. We report a case with a typical history for a poststreptococcal vasculitis causing an axial neuropathy of the right common peroneral nerve.

A 17 year old girl was referred by her general practitioner due to the sudden onset of numbness on the dorsum of her right foot associated with stamping her foot on walking. She had been well until 6 weeks previously when she developed tinnitus for which she received a 1 week course of oral penicillin V. She was also taking minocycline for mild acne. As her throat recovered she developed symmetric polyarthralgia and night sweats which persisted as the numbness developed. There was no history of trauma or compression of the common peroneal nerve at the neck of the fibula.

On examination she had a right foot drop with weakness of ankle dorsiflexion (Medical Research Council grade 3/5). There was sensory loss in the distribution of the common peroneal nerve. She was otherwise neurologically intact with normal reflexes. There were no skin lesions and her joints were quiescent.

She had an erythrocyte sedimentation rate of 87 mm/h, a C reactive protein concentration of 112 mg/l and an antistreptolysin-O titre (ASOT) of 1600 units/ml. Autoimmune screen, antineutrophil antibodies, and cryoglobulins were all negative apart from an atypical perineural antineutrophil cytoplasmic autoantibody (p-ANCA) IgG titre of 160. Renal function was normal in the right tibialis posterior muscle and no spontaneous activity. The tests revealed a necrotising vasculitis. It is unlikely that the streptococcal infection has unmasked a connective tissue disorder due to the negative autoimmune screen apart from the atypical p-ANCA and her improvement as the ASOT fell. Vasculitis after streptococcal infection has been well described. There are also reports of vasculitis causing neuropathies often as part of a connective tissue disorder.  

Surprisingly, streptococcal infection is not a well known antecedent of peripheral nervous system disease, even Guillain–Barré syndrome. There is a report of a 22 year old man who developed a flaccid tetraparesis, raised creatine kinase, and immune complex-mediated rapid progressive glomerulonephritis after a group A streptococcal infection. A sural nerve biopsy showed an inflammatory axonal neuropathy. There are also two cases of mononeuritis multiplex reported after β-haemolytic streptococcal infections. Biopsy of the sural nerve from one of these patients revealed a necrotising vasculitis. Poststreptococcal immune-mediated vasculitis should therefore be more widely recognised as one of the causes of a vasculitic neuropathy.

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A sensory level on the trunk and sparing the face from vertebral artery dissection: how much more subtle can we get?

We read with interest the short report on sensory loss in lateral medullary infarction by Vuadens and Bogousslavsky.1 Unusual sensory variants include contralateral leg and lower trunk with ipsilateral lower face hypalgesia; or contralateral upper trunk, arm, and face hypalgesia; or contralateral hypalgesia with facial sparing; or hemibody sensory loss.2,3 We recently encountered a patient with sensory loss of the spinothalamic type involving only the contralateral leg and lower trunk from vertebral artery dissection. The sensory level in our patient with facial sparing differs from those in the literature; it suggests a thoracic hemicord lesion and is false localising.

A 44 year old, right handed man with no relevant history presented with sudden onset of vertigo and left eye pain. There was no history of trauma or neck manipulation. However, the patient had had a dental abscess involving the lower incisors requiring drainage 4 weeks previously. He has a 30 pack-year history of smoking. Vertigo developed while he was changing his car tyre. He noted that the vertigo was worse when he put his head between his knees. The vertigo lasted 15 minutes and was associated with profuse sweating in the upper half of his body. There was no nausea or vomiting. This recurred twice that day each time lasting 15 minutes.

Examination disclosed normal visual acuity and fundoscopy. There was scleral injection in the left eye. The left pupil was 4 mm compared with 5 mm on the right. Both reacted briskly to light. There was counterclockwise rotary nystagmus in the primary position. The eye movements were normal. Confrontal reflex was intact, and there was no cranial bruit. Tone, power, and reflexes were normal. The sensory examination was normal in all modalities. There was no upper limb ataxia. He tilted to the left on sitting and on standing he fell to the left. The next day he noted loss of pinprick and appreciation of temperature on the right leg and trunk with a sensory level at T9 with preservation of touch, vibration, and joint position sense in all limbs (figure).

Brain MRI showed a small infarct in the lateral medulla and left cerebellum in the

Table Nerve conduction study results confirming a mainly axonal neuropathy of the right common peroneal nerve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nerve/ana</th>
<th>CMAP Amplitude</th>
<th>Terminal latency</th>
<th>Velocity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Right tibial:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ankle</td>
<td>3.2 mV</td>
<td>4.6 ms</td>
<td>49.3 m/s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behind knee</td>
<td>6.6 mV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Right peroneal:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ankle</td>
<td>3.7 mV</td>
<td>5.3 ms</td>
<td>44.8 m/s</td>
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<td>Neck of fibula</td>
<td>3.4 mV</td>
<td>4.9 ms</td>
<td>51.9 m/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind knee</td>
<td>3.2 mV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left peroneal:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ankle</td>
<td>6.5 mV</td>
<td>4.9 ms</td>
<td>50.0 m/s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neck of fibula</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind knee</td>
<td>9.1 mV</td>
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Sensory conductions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nerve</th>
<th>Amplitude</th>
<th>Onset latency</th>
<th>Velocity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sural</td>
<td>11.0 µV</td>
<td>3.1 ms</td>
<td>41.9 m/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right sural</td>
<td>9.6 µV</td>
<td>3.3 ms</td>
<td>39.4 m/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left sural</td>
<td>3.0 µV</td>
<td>3.3 ms</td>
<td>36.4 m/s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CMAP = Compound muscle action potential.
distribution of the lateral branches of the left posterior inferior cerebellar artery. There was a crescent sign involving the left vertebral artery from the skull base to the basilar artery suggesting vertebral artery dissection (figure).

Four types of lateral medullary infarct are recognised: small midlateral infarct, inferolateral infarct, and a large inferodorsolateral and dorsolateral infarct. The topography of the lesion in our patient corresponds to inferolateral medullary infarct. The patients with inferolateral infarcts and midlateral infarcts in the literature were not recognised to have cerebellar infarct and magnetic resonance angiography in those patients was nor-

(A) Drawing of sensory deficits; (B) MRI showing clot in the left vertebral artery and infarcts in the lateral medulla and cerebellum (arrows), (C) arrowhead pointing at the occlusion of the left vertebral artery.

Sudden unexpected death: a rare event in a large community based prospective cohort with newly diagnosed epilepsy and high remission rates

It is now accepted that mortality in epilepsy is significantly increased, with standard mor-

2 Masamoto S, Okada B, Imai T, et al. A sensory level to the trunk may point to a lateral brainstem lesion in the presence of other features suggesting brainstem disease. In our patient these signs were transient and sensory loss predominated. This new pattern of sensory loss should be recognised as symptomatic of lateral medullary infarction in addition to other sensory variants. 1

opportunity for improving the quality of care in malignant cerebral glioma

There is scope for improving the services offered to patients with malignant glioma. Clinical audit has highlighted several important issues including some variation in the management of patients aged over 60, delays in beginning treatment, and problems with communication between different departments involved in patient care. A multidisciplinary Working Group, funded by the NHS Executive, recently developed evidence-based guidelines for the management of these patients by surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy. The group also considered the views of patients and their relatives about follow up and psychosocial aspects of care. We have derived a package of audit measures from these guidelines that allow treatment centres to assess the care that they provide. A proforma within the package covers various topics—for example, technical aspects of treatment, breaking the news of the diagnosis, the support of patients and relatives, and palliative care while in the community. Information is drawn from case records, feedback from patients, relatives and general practitioners. A review of the policy a centre has already developed.

We piloted the proforma by reviewing the case records of 60 patients diagnosed at two treatment centres in London between 1992 and 1994. The table shows some results using one proforma which could challenge the news of the diagnosis. We found, for example, that overall most case records (67%, 14/20) did not record what the patient and their relative had initially been told about the prognosis. However, there did seem to be a difference between centres. At one, clinicians rarely recorded what they had said to patients and relatives whereas at the other this was recorded in just over 50% of cases. Patients at one centre were also more likely to be seen subsequently by counselling or palliative care services. Neither centre had the benefit of a dedicated specialist nurse in neuro-oncology.

The lack of a record does not, of course, mean that the diagnosis and prognosis were not actually discussed in some depth with the patient and relative. However, clearly it is likely to be helpful for others involved in the care of the patient to have sight of such a record. It is also possibly relevant that an earlier study found that only a quarter of a sample of 75 patients drawn from different centres seemed to be fully aware of the likely prognosis for their disease as they began treatment.

As the current review of cancer services after the Calman-Hine report represents an opportunity for the development of neuro-oncology services in Great Britain. A few centres have made progress towards the ideal of neuro-oncology clinics with specialist neurosurgeon and palliative care. The guidelines and audit measures developed by the Group will need to be adapted for services. Neither centre had the benefit of a dedicated specialist nurse in neuro-oncology.

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incidence of stroke due to arterial dissection in older patients and those without neck trauma or pain.

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Auer and Felber reply:
Cheung et al state in their comment, that dissections of extracranial and intracranial vertebrobasilar arteries are an underestimated cause of stroke, because angiography is not performed in every patient during the acute and subacute phase. This bias is even more important in the case of vertebral artery dissection if the initial symptoms are non-specific. Non-invasive diagnostic methods are likely to be performed earlier in these patients and this was our motivation to report on the magnetic resonance angiographic feature of vertebral artery dissection.

The diagnosis of vertebral artery dissection is often based on the consensus of clinical and neuroradiological features. We agree with Cheung et al that there is not a single “gold standard” test for a dissection exists. Imaging procedures more often show indirect signs which have to be interpreted in the appropriate clinical context. Therefore, the “inclusion criterion” we used for this retrospective analysis was the clinical and neuroradiological consensus on the diagnosis of vertebral artery dissection.

The sensitivity of DSA, ultrasound, and MRI/angiography was obtained from the findings of the affected and the contralateral normal vertebral arteries, there were no false positive results. The term specificity could have been misleading, because it did not refer to the overall specificity of a test but to the frequency of findings that reached a level of specificity sufficient to establish the diagnosis of vertebral artery dissection.

Further prospective studies on the sensitivity and specificity of magnetic resonance for the diagnosis of vertebral artery dissections are certainly necessary, but our retrospective evaluation already showed that MRI and MR angiography will have a major contribution in future. As a non-invasive means, magnetic resonance can be employed without risk in patients with non-specific symptoms and may provide specific findings that are not accessible with other methods. This will lead to a better estimation of the true incidence of dissections and will improve the early diagnosis and management of dissections in individual patients.


Clinical usefulness of MRI in multisystem atrophy.

Schrag et al suggest that certain putaminal and infratentorial changes on MRI are useful in distinguishing between patients with multisystem atrophy (MSA) and patients with idiopathic Parkinson’s disease. The specificity and positive predictive value of these changes were both about 90%. However, whether these changes will be useful in clinical practice or epidemiological research is unclear for several reasons.

The number of patients included was small and so the confidence intervals were wide. For example, the specificity of the MRI changes for MSA could be as low as 80%. Moreover, only patients with clinically probable MSA were included. In this group of patients the clinical diagnosis alone had positive predictive value as high as that of MRI and so there would seem to be little added value of MRI (14/15 (93%) patients with probable MSA had the diagnosis confirmed on MRI). A more relevant question is whether the MRI changes are equally specific in those with possible MSA in whom the clinical diagnosis is much less certain. Indeed it is also unclear from this study whether the MRI changes are specific to MSA as patients with other conditions that enter into the differential diagnosis were not included. It may therefore be more correct to state that the MRI changes are helpful in excluding Parkinson’s disease rather than in confirming MSA.

Finally, the positive predictive value of MRI quoted in this study is likely to be an overestimate compared with its routine use in most movement disorder clinics. Schrag et al included a very high proportion of patients with MSA (nearly 50%) compared with Parkinson’s disease. As the positive predictive value is directly related to the prevalence of the disease in a given population, this resulted in a high positive predictive value. In a typical movement disorder clinic, fewer than 10% of patients will have MSA, in which case even if the specificity of MRA is 90%, the positive predictive value would only be about 50%—that is, only half of those with the MRI changes would turn out to have the disease. It is, therefore, too early to include specific MRI changes as part of the diagnostic criteria for MSA.

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A dubious therapy for patients with multiple sclerosis.

Plohmann et al investigated the effects of computer training of attentional deficits in...
patients with multiple sclerosis. They conclude that “significant improvements of performance could almost exclusively be achieved by the specific training programmes”. The validity of this conclusion is called into question by severe methodological shortcomings of their study.

Before training, three baseline measurements of attentional functions were administered with 3 week intervals. For evaluation of training effects the median value of the three baseline measurements was compared with the values obtained after training. This statistical approach manifests a curious misunderstanding of the purpose of repeated baseline measurements. They serve to determine a baseline at which a rate of change is measured without any therapy. The critical value is therefore not the mean (or median) of the baseline measures but the difference between them. If therapy is efficient, the difference between pretherapy and post-therapy measurement should be greater than that between two consecutive baseline measurements. This crucial comparison is not presented.

The selection of the median of the three baseline measurements as starting point for calculation of improvements during the first training period poses further problems. If there was any improvement from the first to the third measurement, the median is lower than the third measurement after which training began. This difference inflates apparent improvement in the first training period. It may feign specific training effects if the therapy had a steeper baseline than the control group. A possible reason for different baselines are different severities of initial impairment. We (Motz, Grömminger, Göttert, Goldenberg, unpublished data) have administered the PASSAT, another test of attentional capacities, four times with weekly intervals to 30 patients with chronic brain damage from different aetiologies. During intervals these patients did not receive any training of attentional functions. Thus, the repeated measurements determined a baseline without therapy. None the less, performance on PASSAT improved from test to test. There was a negative correlation between performance and improvement. Patients with poor initial performance improved more than those with better performance.

The allocation of patients to treatment groups in the study of Plohmann et al was not randomised. Patients were trained in those two functions that were affected most, and group comparisons were made between patients who had been trained in a function and those who were not. Thus the training group tended to start from a lower level of performance than the control group. Figures 2 and 3 of their paper illustrate this effect impressively. If, as suggested by our results with the PASSAT, initial level of impairment has a systematic influence on improvement independently of any therapy, the allegedly specific training effect may be accounted for by the base level in initial level.

Whether or not the results of Plohmann et al study are reliable has clinical and ethical implications. Multiple sclerosis is one of the most common neurological diseases, and I have the suspicion that no other neurological disease has given rise to a comparable number of scientifically unfounded therapies and advice. The above critique raises the possibility that computer assisted retraining of attention is one of them. It may be relatively harmless in that it has no organic side effects. None the less, if its efficacy cannot be proved, it would be a waste of money, time, and patients’ hopes.

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Plohmann and Kappos reply:
We thank Goldenberg for his interest in our paper. After having been actively involved in planning and conducting controlled trials in multiple sclerosis in the past 15 years, we can only agree that the risk of drawing wrong conclusions from unreliable data cannot be overstressed in this area. All the same we cannot follow Goldenberg’s reasoning. His critique is probably based on his own unpublished observations but is neither supported by the available literature nor by our own data.

His main critique is that the effect described in our paper may only reflect non-specific practice effects. Such effects are dependent on the interval between test presentations and the population studied, and differ from test to test according to their respective stability and reliability. In our study we assessed patients with multiple sclerosis in a stable or eventually slighty progressive phase of their disease. For cognitively impaired patients with multiple sclerosis it has been shown in longitudinal studies that they lack practice effects compared to cognitively intact patients. In our data a possible but in no way significant practice effect was found between the first (T1) and second (T2) baseline measurement and—except with two exceptions (“divided attention” and “flexibility”)—not at all between T2 and T3. Clearly significant improvement of performance could only be seen between all three baseline measurements and T4 (Friedman’s two way analysis of variance, Wilcoxon signed ranks test). Also the assumption that the median might be lower than the third measurement and therefore might not be an adequate starting point for statistical comparisons is not supported by our data. In most of the control tests the median is equivalent to T3 or even larger.

Goldenberg’s second point is that the initial level of performance has a systematic influence on improvement independently of any therapy. Furthermore, on the basis of his results concerning the PASSAT, he assumes a negative correlation between initial performance and improvement. As our patients had received specific training in those two functions that were severely impaired and thus started from a lower level of performance, Goldenberg claims that the specific training effects may be accounted for by the differences in initial level of impairment. For this reason we reanalysed our data. For each training group we built subgroups of patients according to their initial capability (low, medium, high) and printed the course of performance during the baseline measurement (T1-T3). Our results do not confirm Goldenberg’s assumption that initial level of performance has a systematic or inverse influence on improvement.

Nevertheless, as already stated in our original paper, due to the small sample size of our study the results do not allow a definite assessment of the training and its effects in patients with multiple sclerosis, but they provide enough evidence to encourage further studies in a larger population of patients. Thus, we have started a prospective multicentre study in comparison with three Swiss neurological rehabilitation centres to further assess and possibly improve this kind computer assisted retraining of attentional functions.

The unpublished additional data mentioned in our letter have been submitted with this letter and are available on request (tables 1a–c, figures 1 and 2).

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Neurology and the gastrointestinal system
Neurology and the gastrointestinal system,1 or an analysis of the “brain-gut” axis would be incomplete without allusion to the neuroendocrine system, and its mediation, via somatostatin, in the regulation of splanchnic blood flow and gastric acid secretion.


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Greenfield's Neuropathology. Sixth Edition. Volume 1 and 2. Edited by David I Graham and Peter L Lantos. (Vol 1 pp 1230, references. Prineas and McDonald have closely and carefully argued, with over 500 tured, generously (and often beautifully) It is (not withstanding the book's two must be as good an account as any available. of the finest wheels to be reinvented. This loss in multiple sclerosis, which surely is one recent topics whose biology and pathology have changed at a breathtaking pace over the past five years, a sure challenge to any textbook harbouring ambitions of deficiency. Typically, both rise to the call with apparent ease. The chapter on prion disease is only 35 pages long, but this is nevertheless a compre-hensive and fine account of an extraordinary area of the human neurology and neuropathology. There are excellent descriptions not only of conventional demyelinating prionopa-thies, but also of rarer, more recently recognised entities such as fatal familial insomnia. The genetic reverses and molecular dissection of the disease are amply covered, and space is even found for specula-tion concerning the possible involvement of prions, in yet another evasive and tantalising disease, inclusion body myositis.

The tumour chapter—an all embracing 200 pages with more than 3000 references (I lost count)—is again quite masterly. The bread and butter tumours are capably described, and there are instructive and useful accounts of other important areas—familial tumours, metastatic disease, etc. Again, the narrative is as contemporary as a large text can be, and more up to date than most, with succinct descriptions of the NF siblings neurofibromin and merlin, and of their biology, as far as is known. Surprisingly, in this genocentric chapter, paraneoplasia is perhaps a little brief.

It would be unforgivable also to omit men-tion of the chapter on peripheral neuropathy (Thomas, Landon, and King). Just 100 pages long, this yet again is a joy to read. The first fifth is devoted exclusively to a description of the normal peripheral nerve, an outstanding account. The whole chapter is (predictably) beautifully illustrated, with authority spread deep and thick and even across the whole landscape of peripheral nerve disease, from new immunological concepts in relation to inflammatory neuropathies, to the molecular genetic advances in inherited nerve disease.

So, it is not easy to criticise. I managed to amass a perfectly miserable haul of just one typo (though quite a howler—BAIL for BALO—in a bold, italicised, large font header). The editing is lightly but highly effectively achieved, biological errors are very few outright omissions. I could find no account of Hashimoto's encephalopathy, which is a shame; I suspect many years of further use might fail to add appreciably to this one omission.

This is such a good book. Do buy one. It is well worth the investment, and will stand by you and repay you all the days of your work-ing life.

NEIL J SCOLDING

BOOK REVIEWS


I was very keen to read this book—mainly because I have heard one of the authors state publicly that stroke patients are being trans-ported by air ambulance to emergency rooms in parts of California and I was won-dering whether he would advocate this in print. Sadly the nearest he got was “This message to the public is simple: the goal is to take the patient to the emergency room as fast as possible using emergency medical transportation and transfer the patient to a hospital that has brain imaging tests available on a 24 hour a day 7 day a week basis.” Not quite, but the tenor of the book is described —contrroversial, not overtly dangerous but rather premature, and, for most parts of the United Kingdom, a work of fiction (at least for the moment).

It is one of those slimline varieties meant for the white coat pocket and is obviously aimed at the emergency room doctor eagerly awaiting an acute stroke patient. In many ways, this is a key area in making treatment decisions with thrombolytic drugs and I was disappointed that this was not done better.

Unfortunately the last few chapters are brief add-ons and could have been dropped in rather impractical section on neuroprotection and a miserly three pages covering rehabilitation and discharge planning.

This book rides on the edge of the evidence and is certainly the “California way”. The authors are to be congratulated for their cam-paigning zeal for the emergency management of stroke which some of us hope will become more widespread. However, it could be argued that at the present time a more useful practical stroke guide would cover how to set up a
neurovascular clinic and stroke unit, how to overcome resistance to change, how to participate in or set up large multicentre trials etc. Whether you read this book will largely depend on your point of view.

LIZ WARBURTON


In choosing the title for this book, the editors have wisely avoided the use of the term “neuropsychiatry”, which in Britain, at least, implies a primarily psychiatric audience. I think that this book should be read by a much wider audience, including neurologists interested in behaviour and cognition. There are relatively few books available that bridge this important divide. The editors have assembled an impressive international cast who cover most of the hot topics at the interface of neurology and psychiatry.

The first section is dedicated to the frontal lobes with contributions from neuropsychology and frontal lobe abnormalities on structural scanning in schizophrenia. The second section deals with basal ganglia disorders with excellent overviews of neuropsychological findings and behavioural psychopharmacology. The third section is dedicated to memory and its disorders, with extremely readable overviews of advances and controversies in the neuropsychology of memory and clinical disorders. The fourth section deals with psychiatric manifestations of patients with a known brain pathology and structural imaging in the psychoses. Stricter editorial intervention could have avoided some redundancy and overlap with an earlier chapter. Section five covers for what is for many people the central ground of neuropsychiatry—namely, epilepsy—with excellent accounts of the behavioural and psychiatric changes seen in the context of chronic epilepsy. The sixth section takes a developmental perspective, particularly related to schizophrenia, and the final two chapters of the book deal with advances in brain imaging, namely magnetic resonance spectroscopy and imaging of patients with hallucinations.

The editors have deliberately decided not to write a comprehensive textbook, but rather to choose areas of advance and controversy, and in doing so have produced a very readable text. The book is in many ways a celebration of the immense contributions of Professor Alwyn Lishman to the study of the brain and mind. I can thoroughly recommend it to everyone working in this exciting area.

JOHN HODGES