



Functional Movement Disorders – Renewed Interest in Our Field’s Last Frontier

– Kathrin LaFaver, MD, and Alberto Espay, MD, Co-Chairs of the MDS Functional Movement Disorders Study Group

Functional Movement Disorders (FMD) are among the most common disorders in a movement disorders clinic, for too long considered the domain of psychology. Over the past decade, there has been renewed interest in the neurobiological underpinnings as well as in improving practices in diagnosis and treatment. The MDS FMD Study Group, established in 2018, has attracted members from 15 countries around the world, and is building a network of researchers motivated to advance the care of these patients. As an effort to plan ahead, we conducted a survey of MDS members to compare perceptions and clinical practices as compared to a similar survey published in 2009¹. The results, presented at the International Congress of Parkinson and Movement Disorders in Nice last fall, showed that while there has been an increase in the practitioners’ willingness to manage patients with FMD, there remain critical gaps in knowledge and poor access to care. Complementary to this effort, FMD Study Group member Dr. Carine Maurer, from Stony Brook, NY, USA, has been gathering data to determine the effect of transcultural differences in the care of FMD patients around the world.

Important changes in DSM-5 diagnostic criteria, which no longer require the presence of psychological stressors for the diagnosis of FMD, and increasing evidence for the benefits of multidisciplinary rehabilitation and psychotherapy approaches stimulated the publication of a collaborative review on current concepts in the diagnosis and treatment of FMD². This piece has stimulated a vibrant conversation on where we are and where we should be.

Our long-term goal is the creation of a biorepository for FMD to study genetic, environmental, psychosocial and neuroimaging markers, categorizing patients into subtypes better suited for a range of therapeutic approaches, and identifying subtype-specific predictors for treatment outcomes. Many of our members are involved in efforts to define optimal outcome measures in FMD research, an important step towards the design and execution of future multicenter treatment trials³.

To justify the investments needed to support these goals, Dr. Chris Stephen, from Harvard Medical School, has been combing data from several healthcare databases showing the steep financial impact of FMD, including the heavy and preventable costs of unnecessary investigations and hospitalizations. The documentation of high medical costs and lost economic opportunities will serve to advocate for improved education and greater research funding.

While lots of work remains to be done, there is exceptional enthusiasm among our members in working towards better understanding and improving the lives of patients with FMD around the world.



Some of the members of the MDS Functional Movement Disorders Study Group at the 2019 American Academy of Neurology Meeting in Philadelphia, PA, USA. Left to right: Anthony Lang, Stephen Reich, Carine Maurer, Alberto Espay, Selma Aybek, Mark Hallett, Allan Wu, Sarah Lidstone, David Perez, Codrin Lungu, Kathrin LaFaver, and Jung Park

References

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2. Espay AJ, Aybek S, Carson A, et al. Current Concepts in Diagnosis and Treatment of Functional Neurological Disorders. *JAMA neurology*. 2018;75(9):1132-1141.
3. Nicholson TR, Carson A, Edwards MJ, et al. Outcome Measures for Functional Neurological Disorder: A Review of the Theoretical Complexities. *The Journal of neuropsychiatry and clinical neurosciences*. 2020;32(1):33-42.