

Letter to the Editor – Towards an Outpatient Model of Care for Motor Functional Neurological Disorders: A Neuropsychiatric Perspective [Letter]

This article was published in the following Dove Press journal:
Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment

Lars de Vroege^{1,2}
Anne Vergeest^{1,2}
Willem Johan Kop^{1,3}

¹Clinical Center of Excellence for Body, Mind and Health, GGz Breburg, Tilburg, the Netherlands; ²Tilburg School of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Tranzo Department, Tilburg University, Tilburg, the Netherlands; ³Department of Medical and Clinical Psychology, Center of Research on Psychological and Somatic Disorders (CoRPS), Tilburg University, Tilburg, the Netherlands

Dear editor

We have read the article written by Saxena et al “Towards an Outpatient Model of Care for Motor Functional Neurological Disorders: A Neuropsychiatric Perspective” with great interest. The authors address relevant information and provide a sound outpatient model.¹ However, some significant issues concerning patients with functional neurological disorders (FND) may be missing in their model which we want to discuss in more detail.

The authors focus on patients with FND, especially the spectrum of motor FND (mFND). They introduce a practical guide and refer to this guide as “[...] a comprehensive assessment guiding the development of a patient-centered treatment plan benefits from interdisciplinary neurologic, psychiatric, allied mental health and rehabilitation perspectives.” Furthermore, they state that specialized tertiary care centers as well as community-based care have to be included in this approach to offer the aforementioned patient-centered care. The authors thus provide an approach that is very useful for clinicians in which the value of state-of-the-art diagnostics including neuropsychiatric screening and a “rule-in” neurological examination is emphasized. Also, they provide assistance in how to deliver the diagnosis of (m)FND and offer an overview of several psychotherapy modalities for mFND. Therefore, their perspective paper is of substantial importance for clinicians working in the field of FND. However one pivotal clinical characteristic of patients with (m)FND, cognitive impairments, is only marginally addressed and should, in our opinion, play a more central role in the neuropsychiatric evaluation and treatment of (m)FND.

In a review, McWhirter et al² state that “Cognitive symptoms are common [...] improve diagnosis and identify effective treatments.” Results of other studies also show that patients with FND present themselves with severe cognitive impairments, primarily within (but not limited to) the domain of information processing speed (eg, Brown et al,³ De Vroege et al⁴). Saxena et al only briefly mention cognitive symptoms when addressing traumatic brain injuries (as part of the physical injuries). Furthermore, cognitive symptoms may have a negative effect on treatment

Correspondence: Lars de Vroege
Lage Witsiebaan 4, Tilburg, 5042 DA, the Netherlands
Tel +31 13 01 61555
Fax +31 13 01 61699
Email L.deVroege@ggzbreburg.nl

outcome and would therefore fit perfectly in their neuropsychiatric approach. After all, they refer to a recent study in which cognitive behavioral therapy did not show a significant treatment effect in patients with mFND and we wonder how many of the 368 patients included in that specific study may have suffered from cognitive symptoms and may have hampered treatment results. In general, we do know that the current treatment options are limited effective and the role of cognitive symptoms may therefore be pivotal to address more extensively in the presented neuropsychiatric approach.

We agree that the biopsychosocial formulation is helpful in clinical practice and the presented neuropsychiatric approach is useful for the assessment and management of mFND. However, based on our own experience, which is supported by some recent studies, we suggest that cognitive symptomatology needs to be addressed more explicitly in this approach. Particularly, since cognitive symptoms can also lead to another therapeutic pathway in which cognitive symptoms are treated⁵ prior to the more conventional psychotherapeutic intervention. We thank Saxena et al for their perspective article and emphasizing the cognitive aspects of mFND may further improve the comprehensive and effective treatment of mFND.

Funding

This communication has no funding source.

Disclosure

The authors have no conflicts to disclose and no financial interest in the subject of matter or materials presented in this communication.

References

1. Saxena A, Godena E, Maggio J, Perez DL. Towards an outpatient model of care for motor functional neurological disorders: a neuropsychiatric perspective. *Neuropsychiatric Dis Treat*. 2020;16:2119–2134. doi:10.2147/NDT.S247119
2. McWhirter L, Ritchie C, Stone J. Functional cognitive disorders: a systematic review. *Lancet Psychiat*. 2010;7(2):191–207.
3. Brown LB, Nicholson TR, Aybek S, Kanaan RA, David AS. Neuropsychological function and memory suppression in conversion disorder. *J Neuropsychol*. 2014;8(2):171–185. doi:10.1111/jnp.12017
4. De Vroege L, Koppenol I, Kop WJ, Riem MME, van der Feltz-cornelis CM. Neurocognitive functioning in patients with conversion disorder/functional neurological disorder. *J Neuropsychol*. 2020. doi:10.1111/jnp.12206
5. De Vroege L, Khasho D, Foruz A, van der Feltz-cornelis CM. Cognitive rehabilitation treatment for mental slowness in conversion disorder. A case report. *Cogent Psychol*. 2017;4(1):1348328. doi:10.1080/23311908.2017.1348328

Dove Medical Press encourages responsible, free and frank academic debate. The content of the Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment 'letters to the editor' section does not necessarily represent the views of Dove Medical Press, its officers, agents, employees, related entities or the Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment editors. While all reasonable steps have been taken to confirm the content of each letter, Dove Medical Press accepts no liability in respect of the content of any letter, nor is it responsible for the content and accuracy of any letter to the editor.

Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment

Dovepress

Publish your work in this journal

Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment is an international, peer-reviewed journal of clinical therapeutics and pharmacology focusing on concise rapid reporting of clinical or pre-clinical studies on a range of neuropsychiatric and neurological disorders. This journal is indexed on PubMed Central, the 'PsycINFO' database and CAS, and

is the official journal of The International Neuropsychiatric Association (INA). The manuscript management system is completely online and includes a very quick and fair peer-review system, which is all easy to use. Visit <http://www.dovepress.com/testimonials.php> to read real quotes from published authors.

Submit your manuscript here: <https://www.dovepress.com/neuropsychiatric-disease-and-treatment-journal>