

Diagnosis and care of functional neurological disorders across cultures: the Italian, Czechian, and Slovakian experience

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Introduction: Functional neurological disorder (FND) presents motor, sensory and cognitive symptoms that display clinical features incompatible with other neurologic conditions [1]. Novel approaches to the diagnosis and treatment of FND have been recently proposed, with improved efficacy in the management of this disabling condition [2]. Yet, culturally based differences in the adoption of the novel approach to FND still need to be established.

Objective: The current cross-cultural study tackles this issue by investigating the knowledge, opinion, and clinical experiences with FND among Italian, Czech, and Slovak neurologists.

Methods: Czech and Slovak neurologists completed a 14-item web-based survey investigating their approach to FND. The questionnaire was adapted from a previous one used by our group to survey Italian neurologists [3]. Results. 232 questionnaires were completed by Czech (n=172) and Slovak (n=60) neurologists. Due to the lack of significant differences, data from these countries were merged and compared with the responses of 490 Italian neurologists.

Results: Our main findings highlighted many similarities between Italian, Czech, and Slovak neurologists: the term “Functional neurological disorders” was used more frequently than other psychological-related terms (e.g., conversion disorder); congruently, respondents preferred explaining symptoms based on abnormal functioning of the nervous system than discussing mental illness, thus suggesting shared terminology and up-to-date conceptualization of FND. Yet, some differences stood out: Czech and Slovak neurologists were more likely to ask for additional neurological investigations (e.g., MRI), and to suggest physiotherapy as a treatment option for patients; more prone to provide educational intervention for patients and their relatives.

Conclusions: Despite the adoption of some new developments in the field of FND, further training is needed to improve knowledge of the diagnostic and therapeutic options for FND and to optimize patient management in different countries.

References:

- [1] Hallett, 2018. Parkinsonism Relat Disord; 46 (Suppl 1):S80–S82.
- [2] Gilmour et al., 2020. J Neurol; 267(7):2164-2172.
- [3] Tinazzi et al., 2022. J Neurol; 269(5):2549-2559.