

Direct costs associated with diagnosing functional neurological disorders

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Introduction: Functional neurological disorders (FND) are among the commonest conditions encountered in clinical practice [1]. Nonetheless, they are frequently mis- or undiagnosed which results in a significant diagnostic delay. Besides the negative impact on prognosis [2], it is unclear whether this diagnostic delay is also associated with higher direct costs for the regional health system (RHS) [3].

Objectives: We here aimed to: I) evaluate the percentage of FND in a sample of consecutive patients attending an outpatient neurologic clinic; II) analyze the direct costs associated with the diagnosis of FND as compared to other neurological disorders (OND); and III) analyze possible economical trends associated with clinic-demographic features of FND.

Method: Consecutive patients attending the general neurology outpatient clinic were recruited and underwent a structured assessment to gather demographic and clinical data as well as data regarding their prior diagnostic process (number of consulted specialists, number and type of investigations, ambulance call out, A&E visit, etc.). The costs were hence calculated based on the RHS tariff. Data were analyzed by means of χ^2 - test and Mann-Whitney test.

Results: One-hundred-fifty-five consecutive patients were recruited, of whom 28 (18%) had FND, 85 (55%) OND and 42 (27%) presented with comorbid FND and OND (CND). FND performed more specialistic visits ($p=.04$) and more investigations ($p=.02$) than OND, which resulted in significantly higher direct total costs [203.34 (384.75) vs 44.1 (216.34); $p=.04$]. In FND, higher direct costs were associated with younger age, presence of trigger and multiple symptoms. CND did not impact on the direct costs as compared to OND.

Conclusions: The diagnosis of FND significantly impacts on the health systems costs, being two-fold higher than those associated with OND. Public policies should be implemented to raise awareness among general practitioners and other medical disciplines to improve diagnostic process in FND.

References

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