



Research Bits

There have been a record number of dystonia clinical studies published in recent years. Here are just a few interesting examples.

Investigating Remission

There are occasional reports of dystonia symptoms going into remission. Given the research and prognosis implications of this, investigators did a systematic review of reports of remission in the medical literature. They reviewed data from 2,551 cases with reports predominantly from individuals with cervical dystonia or blepharospasm/Meige syndrome. Complete remission was reported in 12% and partial remission for 4% of cases. Remission rates were higher in cervical dystonia (15%) than in blepharospasm/Meige (6%). Remission occurred on average 4.5 years after onset of symptoms. However, the majority of patients (64%) experienced a return of symptoms. The data suggested that patients with remission were significantly younger at symptom onset than patients without remission. The investigators called for additional study into this important phenomenon.

Mainka T, Erro R, Rothwell J, Kühn AA, Bhatia KP, Ganos C. Remission in dystonia - Systematic review of the literature and meta-analysis. Parkinsonism Relat Disord. 2019 Sep;66:9-15.

Deep Dive into Oromandibular Dystonia

In a study partially supported by DMRF, an international team of investigators embarked on the most comprehensive examination of the clinical features of oromandibular dystonia (OMD) with the purpose of reducing misdiagnosis. The symptoms of OMD include varying combinations of abnormal jaw, tongue, or lower face movements. OMD is particularly disabling because it often interferes with eating and speaking and can cause severe discomfort. Isolated OMD is estimated to account for only 3–5% of all dystonias. Of the 2,020 cases of OMD reviewed, typical age at onset was in the 50s, and 70% of patients were female. The muscles of the lower face were most commonly affected, followed by jaw, and sometimes tongue. OMD more commonly appeared as part of segmental dystonia, rather than occurring as a focal dystonia or within generalized dystonia. Social anxiety and depression were prominent. Botulinum neurotoxin injections improved symptom severity by more than 50% in approximately 80% of patients.

Scorr LM, Factor SA, Parra SP, Kaye R, Paniello RC, Norris SA, Perlmutter JS, Bäumer T, Usnich T, Berman BD, Maily M, Roze E, Vidailhet M, Jankovic J, LeDoux MS, Barbano R, Chang FCF, Fung VSC, Pirio Richardson S, Blitzer A, Jinnah HA. Oromandibular Dystonia: A Clinical Examination of 2,020 Cases. Front Neurol. 2021 Sep 16;12:700714.

Survey of Musicians Reveal 2%+ Affected by Dystonia

A team of researchers in Brazil set out to evaluate the clinical characteristics and frequency of task-specific dystonia in musicians and to promote awareness of the condition among musicians across the country. They visited orchestras and music schools to deliver lectures on musician's dystonia and invite musicians to complete a questionnaire. They visited 51 orchestras and music schools in 19 Brazilian cities, collecting over 2,200 questionnaires. Of those, 72 individuals with suspicion of dystonia were video recorded and evaluated for motor impairment. Forty-nine individuals (2%+) were diagnosed with dystonia. This is in range with rates reported in previous studies from various countries. The instruments most associated with task-specific dystonia were acoustic guitar (37%) and brass instruments (31%). They concluded that Brazilian musicians with dystonia tend to be male, classical music professionals, around 30 years of age, with arms, hands, or oromandibular muscles most often affected. The research team stressed the career-altering impact of dystonia in musicians and called for greater awareness among musicians, music instructors, and health professionals.

Moura RC, de Carvalho Aguiar PM, Bortz G, Ferraz HB. Clinical and Epidemiological Correlates of Task-Specific Dystonia in a Large Cohort of Brazilian Music Players. Front Neurol. 2017 Mar 6;8:73.

"Musicians with Dystonia Support Forum" is a private Facebook group available for musicians affected by task-specific focal dystonia. Visit the group at: facebook.com/groups/musiciansdystonia