

The impact of psychotherapy in functional neurological disorder: an insight into neurobiological systems

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Introduction: Functional neurological disorders (DNF) are conditions in which the primary pathophysiological processes is the dysfunction of sensory processing, motor or thought output, or both. Limbic influences on awareness and control of sensory, motor and behavioral functions are thought to contribute directly to the generation of DNF symptoms [1].

Assess a definitive diagnosis through positive symptoms found in clinical evaluation is the first step in managing DNF. Afterwards it is important to define a tailor-made multimodal therapeutic approach, where psychotherapy can play an important role.

Objective: To evaluate the impact of a cycle of psychotherapy over time in subjects affected by functional neurological disorder.

Methods: Sixteen subjects diagnosed with DNF were enrolled on a voluntary basis (2 males and 14 females). Subjects were given a cycle of 10 weekly psychological interviews. Before starting the interview cycle (T0), patients were administered two tests: SHEDLER-Westen Assessment Procedure (SWAP), a personality assessment instrument [2], and Affective Neuroscience Personality Scale (ANPS), to measure behavioral traits related to 6 affective neurobiological systems (play, seek, care, fear, anger, and sadness) [3]. The tests were then repeated at the end of the psychotherapeutic cycle (T1) and after two months (T2).

Results: Comparing the performance on the ANPS test before the start of the interviews (T0) and at the end of the process (T1), a significant difference emerges for the sadness system. This difference zeroes when comparing the performance at T0 with the follow-up (T2). Likewise, a significant difference emerges on the SWAP test at T0 and at T1 as regards the narcissistic factor. This difference is zeroed again by comparing the performances before the psychological cycle and after two months from the end of the same.

Conclusions: These data seem to bring out the need to establish a specialist clinic for DNF patients periodically followed by psychotherapists adequately trained in the neuroscientific field.

References:

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