



P20.2. Characteristics of different types of dementia and challenges for the clinician

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Introduction

1. Why do we need an early diagnosis?
2. What are the challenges for the clinician?



Early diagnosis = early support

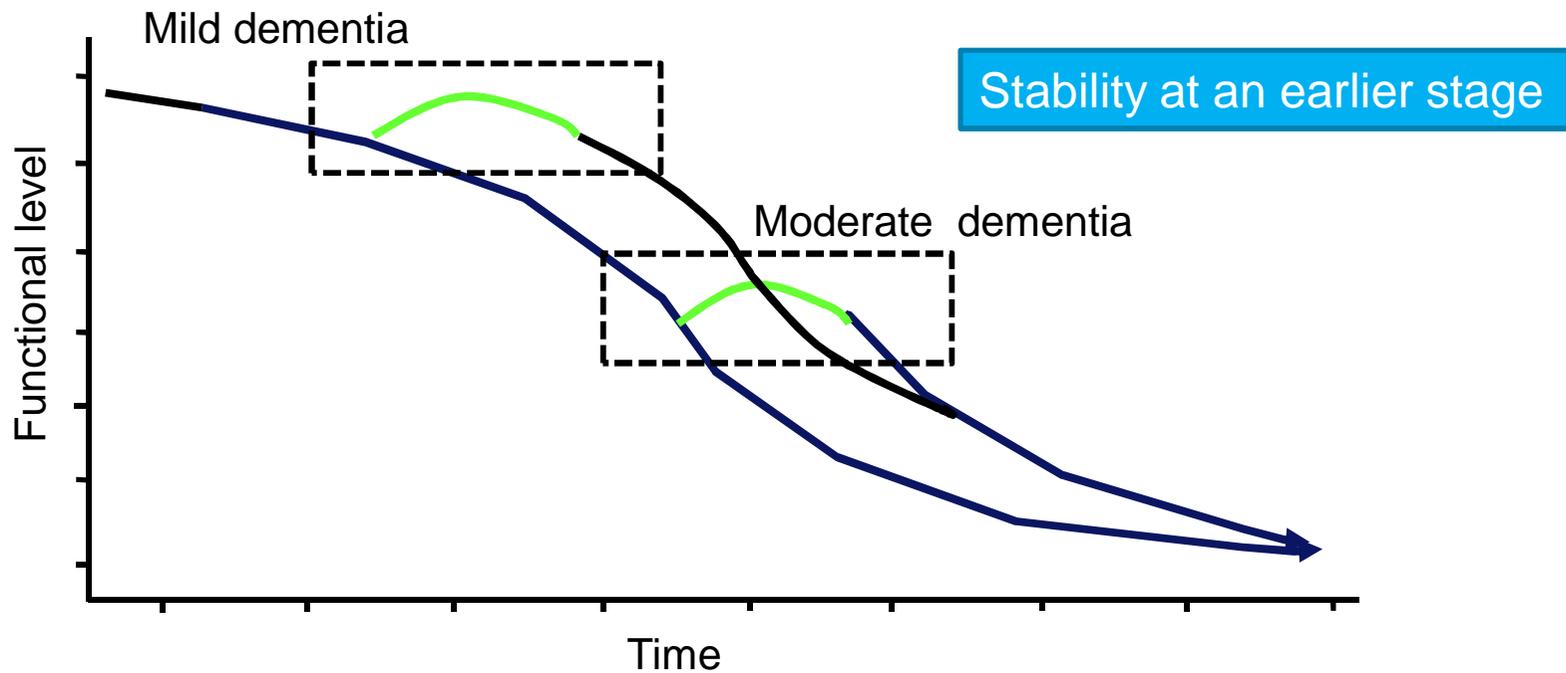
- § Even mild symptoms cause concern and anxiety
- § Patients and caregivers want to know what's wrong
- § Only 50% receive a diagnosis of dementia
- § 25% have cognitive problems due to other causes – often treatable



Correct support requires correct diagnosis



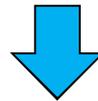
”Medical treatment should be started early” – why?





Challenges for the clinician

Early and mild symptoms require more diagnostic work-up



Conditions other than dementia disorders

Diagnostic challenges

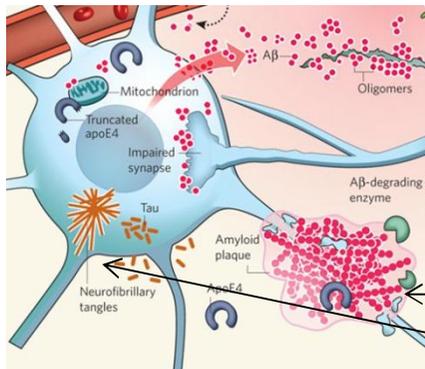
Time



Dementia disorders - differences



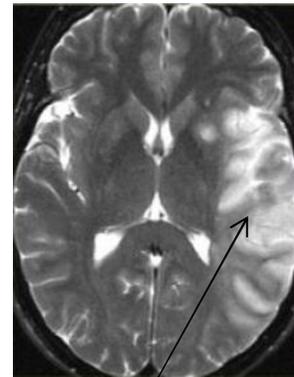
Alzheimer's Disease



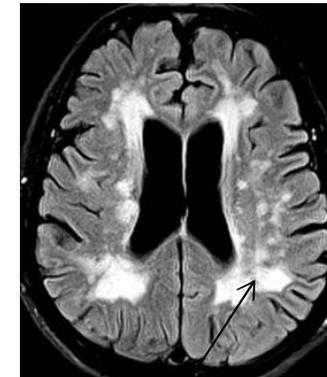
Proteins:
Beta-amyloid
Tau

- Accumulation of abnormal proteins 20-30 years before onset of symptoms
- Causes neurons to die

Vascular Dementia



Infarct



Ischemia

- Damage to neurons due to lack of blood supply to the brain



Dementia disorders - differences



Alzheimer's Disease

- § Always progressive, duration 5-10 years
- § "Predictable" – cognitive dysfunction, behavioural and psychiatric symptoms
- § Specific antidementia treatment
- § Risk factor reduction may be helpful

Vascular Dementia

- § Usual progressive, but may be stable
- § Unpredictable - symptoms vary with timing and location of vascular lesions
- § No specific antidementia treatment
- § Risk factor reduction very important



Dementia disorders - symptoms



Alzheimer's Disease

- § Memory problems:
 - § Cannot remember recent events, asks same questions, forgets appointments
- § Naming problems
 - § Uses other names, talks fluently, but less precise
- § Problems with orientation, problem solving, concentration
- § Irritability, apathy, depression

Vascular Dementia

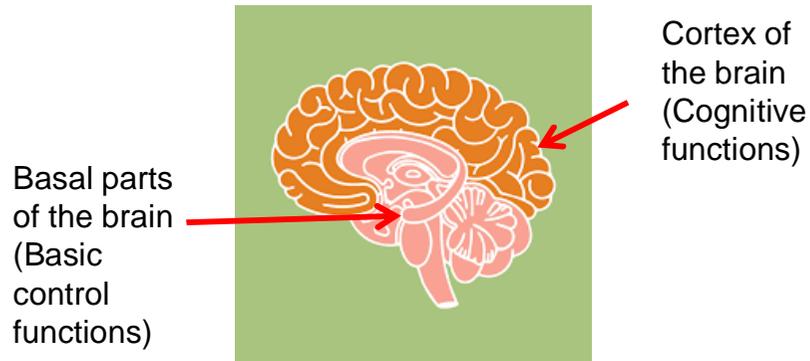
- § Signs of stroke:
 - § Motor problems, reduced visual field, facial palsy, speech problems
- § Signs of ischemia in center of brain:
 - § Reduced attention, slowed mental and motor speed, gait problems, urinary incontinence
- § Emotional lability (crying)
- § But can include all of Alzheimer symptoms



Dementia disorders - differences

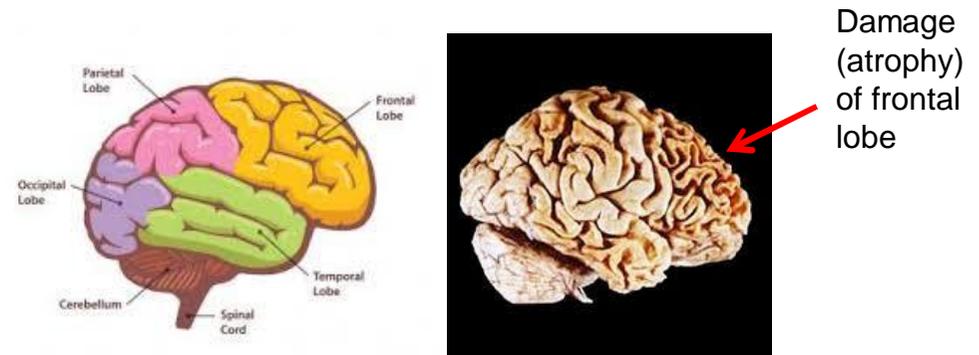


Lewy Body Dementia



- Nerve cell damage affects both basal parts AND cortex of the brain
- Almost never familial

Frontotemporal Dementia



- Nerve cell damage to frontal and temporal parts of the brain
- Often familial – starts earlier than other dementia disorders



Dementia disorders - differences



Lewy Body Dementia

- § Progressive, complicated by movement problems
- § Parkinson (motor) symptoms, visual hallucinations, fluctuation in alertness, episodes of confusion
- § Acting out dreams
- § Cannot tolerate antipsychotic medication
- § Specific antidementia treatment very effective

Frontotemporal Dementia

- § Progressive, very variable course, duration 2-10 years
- § Behavior and personality changes – emotionally blunting, disinhibition, loss of motivation
- § Problems with planning, easily distracted, naming problems
- § No specific antidementia treatment, but psychosocial support extremely important



Diagnosing dementia disorders - summary

First step

- § Is cognition impaired – just worried or abnormal on testing?
- § Rule out other causes for cognitive impairment – depression, psychosocial stress, drugs, alcohol, ..

Second step

- § Should always be decided after careful discussion with person in question and caregiver
- § What is the underlying brain disorder?
- § Mild symptoms require more investigations

It matters: early diagnosis = early support



Is it always so difficult? A case story

- § 71 year old female
- § Memory complaints since 4 years, problems with orientation in time (day, month, year) and place (sometimes loses her way)
- § Symptoms interfere with cooking, shopping and driving
- § History of hypertension and diabetes, gets medication for these disorders
- § No other causes for cognitive impairment
- § Dementia?
 - § Cognitive impairment that affect daily function
- § Underlying brain disorder?

