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Characteristics of a cohort of MS patients in Abu Dhabi

N. Schiess, F. Al-Kendi, M. Szolics

Background/objective: Evidence suggests the prevalence of multiple sclerosis (MS) in the Middle East is higher than expected. A study in Dubai demonstrated a surprisingly high crude prevalence rate in the Emirate population (medium to high risk) 1. This underscores the importance of looking at other Emirate cohorts. Thus a study of MS patients in Al Ain was conducted to examine disease characteristics among Emirate MS patients.

Methods: A retrospective chart review was conducted on MS patients at Tawam Hospital, Al Ain. Characteristics examined included gender, MS type, age at symptom onset, type of symptoms at onset, immunomodulatory therapy, vitamin D and B12 levels, concurrent ANA positivity, oligo-clonal/IgG positivity, family history and presence of spinal cord lesions.

Results: One hundred and five MS patients were identified. Average age of onset was 26.6 years. Male:female ratio was 1:2.75. Emirate patients comprised 82% and 13% were of Middle Eastern descent. The majority (88.5%) had EDSS scores below 5.5% and 83% were RRMS. SPMS patients comprised 9.5% and CIS 6.6%. Sensory symptoms were the most common presenting symptom (39%) followed by visual (36%). Average vitamin D levels among patients tested was 28 nmol/L without supplementation. Average vitamin B12 levels were 262 pmol/L and 13% of patients had concurrent ANA positivity. 8.8% of patients had a relative affected with MS and 83% of patients had spinal cord lesions on MRI imaging. The most popular immunomodulatory treatments were interferons (35%), natalizumab (12%) and fingolimod (9.5%).

Conclusions: Findings were similar to the Dubai Emirate cohort of patients in male/female ratio with almost identical mean age of onset. Results differed for symptoms at onset with sensory symptoms followed by visual, then motor. A low vitamin D level in our study is consistent with findings published from other cohorts of MS patients. Treatment choices were similar to western trends.