CORRESPONDENCE

Multiple Sclerosis Registry in Germany

Results of the Extension Phase 2005/2006

by Priv.-Doz. Dr. med. Peter Flachenecker et al. in volume 07/2008

Article of 30 Years Ago

As much as the implementation of the MS registry is to be welcomed, it comes as something of a surprise that no mention is made of the epidemiological studies from Göttingen and Darmstadt of 40 years ago. Further "installments" to these studies have also been published (1, 2, 3). They deal with the illness course, age at onset of illness, fitness to work, age and sex distribution, trigger factors for MS or factors that lead to deterioration, and prognostic criteria. Our research in Göttingen and Darmstadt was supported by the German Research Foundation and the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft, and has been supported up to now by the Hertie Foundation. In the area of epidemiological MS research, two habilitation (professoral) theses, many individual studies, and numerous PhD theses have been published. It was of particular importance to set out reliable data on prevalence, incidence, and mortality in different parts of Germany. The methodological problems have been discussed on numerous occasions. Initially we preferred detailed field studies. Our results are pretty consistent with these new data. In spite of all the work that has gone into them, the new data yield hardly any new results. Our studies have been published in different German language publications but also in international journals. The fact that they were not cited in the bibliography of the study reported by Flachenecker et al. leads us to the conclusion that their literature search was not solid; otherwise it may be assumed that our studies would have been identified. About 30 years ago I published a longer article in *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, on the epidemiology of MS; the global distribution of MS that was described in the article even made the week's cover image. DOI: 10.3238/arztebl.2008.0318a

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Conflict of interest statement

Professor Firnhaber declares that no conflict of interest exists according to the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.

In Reply:

The reader's letter reminds us of the early epidemiological studies in Hesse and southern Lower Saxony, which yielded important results about the prevalence of MS in circumscribed areas, in a population-based approach. We were fully aware of those publications – directional in their day – as is obvious from the fact that these were included in the text and illustrations in more recent review articles on the epidemiology of MS (1, 2). As we pointed out briefly in the discussion of our paper, the MS registry is not a population-based study. When a center-based approach is used, in the setting of Germany's current healthcare structures, a blanket coverage, population-based study is an impossibility. Because of the limited word count in our article, we could not include a detailed discussion of epidemiological studies conducted so far – we would have had to include results not only from Darmstadt and Göttingen, but also from Rostock and Halle, the Ruhr-Rhine area, the Vogtland (southwestern Saxony), and other German regions. The MS registry aims to describe healthcare provision for patients with MS as comprehensively for Germany as possible – in contrast to Prof. Firnhaber, who aims to set out reliable prevalence, incidence, and mortality data. We are delighted that some of our results have confirmed earlier findings from regional studies, but we think that the data on diagnosis and treatment that we presented in our article constitute an important and innovative contribution towards optimizing healthcare provision for MS patients in Germany.

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PD Dr. Flachenecker has received fees for speaking from Bayer-Schering, Merck-Serono, Biogen, Sanofi-Aventis, and Novartis.