

7th Global Experts Meeting on

NEUROPHARMACOLOGY

July 31-August 02, 2017 | Milan, Italy

The impact of brain lesions on basic emotions and emotion regulation in stroke survivors

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Statement of the Problem: Panksepp (1998) first proposed an “affective neuroscience” approach to explore foundations of human and animal emotions in connection with specific subcortical brain systems which underlie the self (core Self) and the self-referential processing. In particular, four basic emotional systems (seeking, anger, fear and lust) were identified having evolutionally deep reptilian roots and three (Caring, sadness and play) reflect more uniquely mammalian adaptations. The Affective Neuroscience Personality Scales (ANPS) have been developed to evaluate these emotional, personality tendencies in humans. The alterations of basic emotions after brain injury according to Panksepp’s theory remain understudied. The aim of this presentation is to illustrate the outcomes of recent researches that studied basic emotions and emotion regulation in stroke survivors and their implication for pharmacological treatments and rehabilitation in clinical practice.

Methodology: A sample group of stroke patients and a control group of orthopedic patients both hospitalized and in post-acute phase were evaluated by two self-report questionnaires: ANPS and HADS (Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scales) taking into account the location of brain damage.

Findings: Stroke patients showed statistically significant lower scores in ANPS-SEEKING and higher scores in depression by HADS in comparison with the control group. Moreover, further alterations in basic emotion systems in comparison to the control group were found, highlighting a specific pattern of emotion regulation. The involvement of anterior subcortical-cortical midline-structures was evident.

Conclusions & Significance: The specific changes and alterations of basic emotions and dispositions towards the external environment in relation to peculiar brain damage in stroke entail tailored stimulations and modulations of physiotherapeutic and pharmacological treatments during the rehabilitation process. Furthermore, a tailored psychotherapeutic intervention often needs to support patients and their caregivers; the involvement of caregivers is necessary due to their role in emotion regulation in daily life.

Biography

Marina Farinelli has completed her MD and is a Specialist in Clinical Psychology, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatic Diseases (ICPM). Her main fields of interest for research and clinical practice are the psychosomatic approach and neuroscience. She has taught at Bologna and Chieti Universities (Italy). Working with neurological patients at Villa Bellombra Rehabilitation Hospital (Bologna) since 1996, she established and currently coordinates a Clinical Psychology Service to support patients and their caregivers, integrate the multi-professional team and carry out researches. Since 2009, she has been coordinating the research project devoted to stroke patients entitled, “The impact of brain lesion on internalization/externalization processes: a neuropsychodynamic study” carried out in collaboration with the Neuroradiological Unit (IRCCS) of Bellaria Hospital of Bologna, the Department of Psychology, Bologna University and the Institute of Mental Health University, Ottawa. The clinical and research experiences and findings have been presented at numerous national and international congresses and published in scientific journals.

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