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NEUROLOGIC AND PSYCHIATRIC CO-MORBIDITY
IN NEUROPSYCHIATRY TRAINING

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BACKGROUND: Little guidance exists on how many patients or diagnoses must be seen in training to establish competency in neuropsychiatry. Combined neuropsychiatry training is well established, but the overlap between patients seen in neurology and psychiatry is poorly characterized.

METHODS: Case logs of 1552 training patients and 300 psychiatry moonlighting patients evaluated over 5 years by a recently graduated combined neuropsychiatry resident were analyzed for diagnostic distribution using DSM-IV and ICD-10. In cases where ICD-10 differed from DSM-IV, the ICD-10 classification was used to allow greater specificity of neurological and medical diagnoses. Patients were also classified as “psychiatric,” “neurologic,” “both,” or “neither.” Data were analyzed by service (neurology vs. psychiatry) for age distribution, DSM-IV diagnosis, ICD-10 diagnosis, quantity of “neuropsychiatric” patients, and presence of psychiatric and neurologic comorbidity.

RESULTS: Using DSM-IV, of 735 patients evaluated during psychiatry training, 564 (77%) had only psychiatric pathology, 26 (4%) had only neurologic pathology, 132 (18%) had both and 13 (2%) had neither. Of 817 patients evaluated during neurology training, 27 (3%) had only psychiatric pathology, 486 (59%) had only neurologic pathology, 300 (37%) had both, and 4 (0%) had neither (FIGURE ONE). Of 300 patients seen during psychiatry moonlighting, 241 (80%) had only psychiatric pathology, 26 (4%) had only neurologic pathology, 132 (18%) had both, and 26 (8%) had neither (FIGURE FIVE). 42.8% of patients seen in neurology had a comorbid diagnosis from the other field using ICD-10. Psychiatric diagnoses were found in 43 (23.5%) of the patients evaluated during neurology training, 435 (46.3%) had a psychiatric diagnosis, and 453 (24.5%) had both psychiatric and neurologic diagnoses. 71% of the total group had a psychiatric diagnosis and 48% had a neurologic diagnosis when patients are classified allowing dual group assignments for the "both" group. 19.7% of patients seen in neurology and 42.8% of patients seen in neurology had a comorbid diagnosis from the other field using ICD-10.

Combined neuropsychiatric diagnoses were seen with approximately equal frequency (16-18%) on psychiatry, neurology, and neuropsychiatry services. TABLE ONE shows specific service rates. Psychiatric diagnostic groups seen on neurology and psychiatry services are compared in FIGURE FOUR. Specific psychiatric and neurologic comorbidities for various diagnoses are shown in TABLE TWO. Neurological comorbidity was highest among childhood psychiatric disorders (48%) with mood disorders (18%) and substance abuse disorders the lowest at 9%. Psychiatric comorbidity was highest for mood disorders in headache patients (25%), multiple sclerosis (22%) and Parkinson disease (21%). Psychosis was found in 7% of dementia, 5% of epilepsy, and 4% of Parkinson disease. Substance abuse was found in 9% of epilepsy and 5% of headache and chronic pain cases. Medical comorbidities seen most frequently in the entire group were cardiovascular (21%) and endocrine (16%) (TABLE THREE).

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DISCUSSION: Data from a single experience study such as this are highly influenced by the case mix peculiar to a single teaching program, the rotation lengths, and by the diagnostic practice of the single trainee assigning diagnoses. However, a single rater assigning diagnoses over 5 years offers some consistency. The similarity between the psychiatric diagnostic frequencies in the psychiatry residency patients and the mixed psychiatric hospital “moonlighting” patient population suggests some generalizability within psychiatry. With only 22 residents in the 9 ABPN-approved combined neuropsychiatry programs, a large scale competency study would be difficult.

CONCLUSIONS: Although a neuropsychiatry teaching clinic is considered one indicator of quality in neuropsychiatry programs, these data indicate that psychiatric inpatient units and neurology clinic and consultation services are also excellent venues for neuropsychiatry teaching. Medical comorbidity data suggests that rotations in cardiology and endocrinology might be useful during the Neuropsychiatry PGY-1 year. Twice as many neurological patients (42.8%) had co-morbid psychiatric conditions than psychiatric patients had neurological conditions (19.7%). These data both reinforce the need for more rigorous psychiatric training of neurology residents and reflect one advantage of conducting the bulk of psychiatry training prior to the bulk of neurology training in combined Neuropsychiatry programs. Comparison of case mix between combined training and neuropsychiatry fellowship programs would be interesting in light of recent UCNS recognition of neuropsychiatry fellowship training. Additional data such as these are needed to help establish competency criteria for neuropsychiatry training.

REFERENCES: