

The natural history of restless legs syndrome: retrospective data on a clinical sample

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Objective

To evaluate the "natural history" of idiopathic restless legs syndrome (iRLS) by means of a questionnaire with 17 questions.

Methods

One hundred and fifty (150) patients with iRLS attending the Sleep Disorders Center of the San Raffaele hospital of Milan were consecutively enrolled. Eighty-four (56%) women, 66 (44%) men, age: 60.3 ± 14.38 , age at onset 44.5 ± 17.66 , IRLS 23.9 ± 6.42 , PLMI 41.0 ± 48.21 , ESS 6.7 ± 4.66 , ferritin level 98.5 ± 121.14 . The diagnosis of iRLS was based on the International Classification of Sleep Disorders, 2nd Edition (ICSD-2) criteria [American Academy of Sleep Medicine] for RLS. Secondary forms of RLS were excluded on the basis of clinical history data and neurologic examination.

Results

Twenty-one percent (21%) of patients reported RLS age onset between 46-55 years, 19% between 36-45 years and 15% between 26-35 years. No family history for RLS in 45% of this sample was recorded, while 42% of patients reported a parent with RLS. Twenty-three percent (23%) of RLS patients had never had any problems with sleep, while 21% had had sleep problems in the past 10 years. Among patients who had had sleep disturbances before the onset of RLS (57%), 85% suffered from insomnia. Thirty-seven per cent (37%) of subjects reported symptoms of RLS to be "sporadic" at onset, 30% "fluctuating", and 15% "intermittent". At onset, 46% of subjects reported the severity of RLS symptoms to be "mild". The frequency of symptoms at onset was reported to be ≤ 1 /week in 65% of patients, 2-3/week in 23%, and more than 3 times/week in 12% of patients. In 73% of patients symptoms tended to worsen over time and only in 19% they were stable. In 29% of patients, approximately 3-5 years occurred between RLS onset and diagnosis/treatment. In 73% of subjects therapy remained stable. Thirty-five per cent (35%) of subjects took only one drug for RLS treatment, 29% 2 drugs, ≥ 3 drugs were used by 22% of patients. At the time of this study, 69% of subjects reported RLS symptoms more than 3 times/week. The intensity of the symptoms was "moderate" in 55% and "severe" in 28%. In women (84/150) the impact and the severity of the syndrome were evaluated, as well as its variations during pregnancy. Forty per cent (40%) of women had no pregnancies, 27% had one pregnancy and 29% had two pregnancies; 66% of

women reported no variations on RLS symptoms during pregnancy, 10% a “mild” worsening, another 10% a “moderate” worsening while 6% complained a “severe” worsening.

Conclusion

This study indicates that despite the availability of drugs believed to be effective in RLS and their regular use in the majority of patients with a correct diagnosis, the symptoms of this chronic disease tend to persist and are considered clinically significant in a high number of patients, half of whom need more than one drug. This also points to the need of the development of new and more effective therapeutic strategies.