
"Chronic traumatic encephalopathy is a disorder you can see and hear."

This letter is in reference to the article by McKee et al in July 2009 on chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) (1). I recently read an earlier article by Gareth Roberts and colleagues that discusses the clinical features of CTE (2). At the bottom of the first column and page of the Roberts article, beginning with "Three stages of clinical deterioration..." and ending in the next column with "...pyramidal tract disease," is a section that is remarkably similar to the McKee et al article that begins on top of page 3, "Corsellis, Bruton, and Freeman-Browne...", and ends in the same paragraph with "...speech and gait abnormalities." In the 65-word section of McKee et al, 45% of the words are verbatim from Roberts et al, with 97% of those words appearing in the same sequence (sequence defined as 2 or more words in the same order as Roberts). In addition, McKee et al did not cite Roberts on this point but instead cited Corsellis (reference 29 in [1]). Corsellis did not propose CTE stages.

Macdonald Critchley coined the term "CTE" (reference 42 in [1]). In his 1957 article, he reported having seen 69 cases and presented 11 patients who he thought were representative; all except 2 had dysarthria.

In 1969, A.H. Roberts performed a landmark clinical study (3). Before outlining his study, Roberts reviews 53 cases in the literature in which the boxer's career and neurologic status are discussed. Of the 53 cases, all except one had either dysarthria or a core symptom of Parkinson disease; 36 of the 53 had both. The article of Dr. McKee et al does not discuss the parkinsonian findings of A. H. Roberts or Critchley. In my opinion, their CTE bears no clinical likeness to the CTE of the last century.

The passage that is the focus of this letter seems to be the only place in the literature that makes the assertion that psychiatric symptoms are the first stage of CTE. Gareth Roberts et al offer no citation nor can I find any empirical evidence for the claim. The passage is misattributed to Corsellis because his article provided the neuropathologic evidence for CTE. The clinical features had been described, so he only collected a cursory retrospective history through relatives. Chronic traumatic encephalopathy is now a postmortem diagnosis awaiting a technologic innovation to allow for an antemortem diagnosis. What was Critchley doing back then?

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Conflicts of Interest Disclosures: Dr. Andrikopoulos has provided expert testimony.

References

Author's Reply:

We thank Dr. Andrikopoulos for his interest in our work (1). The 2009 article was originally submitted in a much longer form (the article is 27 printed pages). The section referred to by Dr. Andrikopoulos was originally more detailed and included references to Corsellis et al (2) and Roberts et al (3) (reference 4 in [1], which is cited in the Introduction). In response to the reviewers’ request for brevity, the section was substantially shortened and the reference to Roberts et al was dropped at that point in the review. We apologize for the omission.

Our article was a review of all neuropathologically confirmed cases. The book by A.H. Roberts is a series of clinical case reports. We did not include the book because it did not fit the focus of the review.

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References