

Editorial

Andreas Steck

This issue leads off with an interesting review on functional neurological disorders by Christian Greiner et al., outlining current clinical practice and potential treatments. Functional disorders are common in neurology and general medical practice, and physicians are often uncertain how to approach patients with these problems. The situation is confounded by the fact that even naming the condition is a challenge. Some of the innovative hypotheses are based on data generated by neuroimaging studies examining brain activity in order to explore the neural basis of functional neurological disorders. The challenge will be to integrate and understand these neurobiological data in a psychodynamic model. Among the many useful steps in management, physiotherapy has long been considered to be an important component of treatment. Pharmacological therapies are used frequently, presumably targeting underlying depressive or anxiety symptoms. Neuromodulation by means of noninvasive brain stimulation methods has been proposed and is currently evaluated. Psychological treatment is commonly used. Psychotherapy, such as a psychoanalytic approach, aimed at a better understanding of the patient's emotional life has been found helpful. A big challenge is to explain their symptoms to the patients. Given the highly complex aspects of psychosomatic disorders, there is a strong need to develop interdisciplinarity between neurologists and psychiatrists for optimising patients' care and defining appropriate treatment strategies.

The review "The Istanbul Protocol (Manual on Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment)" by Thomas Wenzel et al. is a timely reminder that torture is common in some countries. Torture remains a key theme in healthcare and a number of publications confirm its relevance also in regard to mental health. Posttraumatic stress disorder, chronic pain and depressive disorders are the most common sequelae. Medical ethical and legal aspects are discussed and the importance of rehabilitation programmes is stressed.

Anik Debrot et al. present a field study of outcomes in a general psychiatry day hospital in the canton of Fribourg. The effectiveness of partial hospitalisation or day hospital care is a subject of considerable current relevance, especially at a time of increasing pressure on allocation of health resources. This study, the first in Switzerland, presents a comprehensive picture of a day hospital. It is based on an analysis of a large representative sample of the treated population and the data were gathered over more than 3 years. Several questions were addressed, such as evaluation of different treatment outcome indicators and treatment improvement predictors. Obviously, in a highly diverse population, with heterogeneous diagnoses, illness severity and comorbidities, outcomes will be variable. Nevertheless, some interesting trends emerge. Overall, patients had a significant improvement in their functioning level during the stay. Patients with a substance-related disorder benefited less from the treatment, whereas patients with an affective disorder benefited more. Importantly, longer treatment and more frequent attendance at the day hospital predicted a better outcome. It is worth mentioning that this was not a randomised controlled study comparing the effectiveness of a day hospital with outpatient or inpatient services. Future studies in this important area of mental health treatment options are clearly needed.

The interview of Niklas Baer by Karl Studer emphasises the importance of work rehabilitation for mentally ill patients. Dr Baer describes how a partnership-based collaboration between patients, psychiatrists, employers and insurers can improve work rehabilitation. During a study trip through Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong, Hanspeter Walti visited various institutions and organisations. His travel report summarises the impressions gained and observations on "International strategies and concepts for the early detection of mental disorders and suicide prevention", pointing out the particular characteristics of the individual countries.