

Subtle Seizures May Cause Dementia, Be Reversible

BY DOUG BRUNK
San Diego Bureau

SAN DIEGO — Seizures in elderly patients may present as subtle changes or unexplained fluctuations in cognitive abilities, results from a small study demonstrated.

The finding suggests that physicians “need to consider subtle or subclinical seizures in the differential diagnosis of cognitive deficits in the elderly,” researchers led by Dr. Eliot A. Licht wrote

in a poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Neuropsychiatric Association. “Epilepsy is a potentially reversible cause of dementia.”

In an interview, Dr. Licht of the department of neurology at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System said the finding “introduces another possible treatment intervention for patients who might otherwise be receiving standard cholinesterase inhibitor therapy. We’re trying to expand the window of in-

vestigation to identify alternative treatments that might help to improve their cognitive functions.”

Over a period of 6 months, he and his associates identified six patients aged 64-83 years who presented to the VA’s memory disorders program for an evaluation of dementia. All patients underwent clinical examinations for seizure activity and received standard awake and drowsy electroencephalograms (EEGs). One of the six was known to have epilepsy.

EEGs showed recurrent epileptiform activity in all six patients. “This is not to say that in every case the epileptiform activity was causing all of their cognitive deficits, but it’s possible that it was contributing to it,” Dr. Licht said.

“This is a source of information that would not have been available had we not done EEG,” he added.

Risk factors for seizures included stroke or ischemic changes, history of tumor, and history of electroconvulsive therapy. ■

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