High Anxiety Rate Warrants Screening in

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BAL HARBOUR, Fla. — All people with multiple sclerosis should be screened for anxiety, according to a study presented at the annual meeting of the American Neuro-psychiatric Association.

Researchers randomly selected 100 people and screened them for anxiety using DSM-IV criteria. “We found the rates of anxiety were high,” said the second author of the study.

The researchers did not assess patient anxiety according to lesions visible on magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or disease burden, but they plan to do so in the future. Dr. Chemali is the director of the neuropsychiatry at the Brigham Behavioral Neurology Group at Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

Researchers grouped the 70 women and 30 men according to the types of multiple sclerosis episodes. Participants included 49% with relapse-remitting disease, 32% with secondary progressive multiple sclerosis, 16% who experienced their first multiple sclerosis attack, and 3% with primary progressive disease.

Results indicate that anxiety is not related to severity or chronicity of multiple sclerosis, suggesting that screening is appropriate for all patients with the disease.

Researchers assessed prevalence of affective disorders, anxiety disorders, and comorbidities between the two. “An interesting finding is the higher level of anxiety than depression,” said Dr. Urizar.

A total of 37% of participants had an anxiety disorder, 20% had depression, and 20% had comorbid anxiety and depression.

In addition, 21% presented with cognitive decline. Manic-depressive disorder was included with depression in the study, Dr. Chemali said.

The neuropsychological battery of tests included:

- The Boston Naming Test for language
- The Dotted Word Span Test or the Boston Selective Reminding Test for memory
- The Trail Making Test (Parts A and B), a digit span test, and letter cancellation test for attention
- Beck Depression Inventory for mood assessment
- Beck Anxiety Inventory for anxiety

Participants also asked to copy a cube and place the numbers and hands in a clock, and were given the Rey-Osterrieth Complex Figure Test.

The prevalence of anxiety was higher among women than men. “The gender difference reflects the fact that MS is more common in women than in men,” Dr. Chemali said. The disparity could also reflect the reportedly higher prevalence of anxiety in women compared with men in the general population—a highly debated subject, because women present at or use more medical/psychiatric services than do men, which could lead to higher rates being recorded as higher among women.

The study findings demonstrate that patients with multiple sclerosis can suffer debilitating anxiety and depression in an affective disorder. However, the authors wrote in their poster, “Further study is needed to confirm these findings.”