

How Do I Explain the Diagnosis of Functional Movement Disorder to a Patient?

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Abstract: Functional movement disorders (FMDs) are common in neurological practice and a source of significant distress and disability. There is consensus that successful explanation which helps the patient feel confident that the diagnosis is correct is an essential platform for further treatment. Many doctors find delivering the diagnosis difficult. In these two short films, we explore why certain ways of approaching the explanation of an FMD can cause difficulties, especially failure to give an explicit diagnostic label, and a tendency to jump to a speculative etiological discussion about possible psychological factors instead of helping the patient understand the nature and mechanism of the movement disorder itself. Demonstrating the physical signs to the patient is often of key importance in helping the patient to understand that, first, the diagnosis is made positively and not just because the tests are normal. Crucially, it also shows the potential for symptom reversibility, which can then feed in to an understanding of how physiotherapy promotes automatic movement and “retrains the brain.” Seeing the patient again is important in assessing the patient’s confidence and readiness for therapy as well as calibrating your own communication skills.

Author Roles

J.S. wrote the script. I.H. revised the script.

Disclosures

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References

1. Stone J, Carson A, Hallett M. Explanation as treatment for functional neurologic disorders. *Handb Clin Neurol* 2016;139:543–553.
2. Stone J, Gelauff J, Carson A. A “twist in the tale”: altered perception of ankle position in psychogenic dystonia. *Mov Disord* 2012;27:585–586.

Supporting Information

Supporting information may be found in the online version of this article.

Video S1. Video 1 looks at common pitfalls of explanation of FMD, including failure to make a positive diagnosis and jumping to conclusions about psychological factors. It then presents an alternative based on normal practice. Name the condition and explain how the physical signs, such as the tremor entrainment test, lead to the diagnosis.¹ Use the signs to explain why treatment may help.

Video S2. Video 2 uses clips from patients with FMD to explore how it is possible to explain functional limb weakness and functional dystonia to a patient. We discuss the follow-up visit, and the importance of assessing patient’s confidence in the diagnosis and readiness for further treatment referral. Clips reproduced by permission of Itzit Films (<https://youtu.be/w4lqr4Mo32M>) and Wiley.²

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Supporting Information

Filename	Description
mdc312785-sup-0001-VideoS1.mp4 MPEG-4 video, 421 MB	Video S1. Video 1 looks at common pitfalls of explanation of FMD, including failure to make a positive diagnosis and jumping to conclusions about psychological factors. It then presents an alternative based on normal practice. Name the condition and explain how the physical signs, such as the tremor entrainment test, lead to the diagnosis. ¹ Use the signs to explain why treatment may help.
mdc312785-sup-0002-VideoS2.mp4 MPEG-4 video, 204.1 MB	Video S2. Video 2 uses clips from patients with FMD to explore how it is possible to explain functional limb weakness and functional dystonia to a patient. We discuss the follow-up visit, and the importance of assessing patient's confidence in the diagnosis and readiness for further treatment referral. Clips reproduced by permission of Itzit Films (https://youtu.be/w4lqr4Mo32M) and Wiley. ²

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