

**Reference**

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**A Malignant Corpus Callosum Tumour in an 85-year-old Demented Woman**

DEAR SIR,

An 85-year-old widow with progressive dementia was admitted to hospital for two weeks to provide relief to her family. On admission her grossly defective cognitive state was confirmed but she was mobile, had spontaneous speech, dressed and fed herself and co-operated with the staff. On discharge she went into a residential home and, almost immediately, there appeared a dramatic change in her behaviour. She had become incontinent of urine and faeces, had slowed up considerably and had to be fed, taking two hours to eat a small meal. Over the next 10 days she continued to withdraw, totally lacked any spontaneous movement and had to be re-admitted to hospital. There she was mute but appeared to be aware of things and responded to sounds. She was immobile and continued to be doubly incontinent. A CT head scan revealed a "large malignant tumour in the anterior portion of the corpus callosum, which (was) displacing the lateral ventricles posteriorly". It was deemed inoperable. She rapidly became comatose and died without much pain four weeks later. Apart from some vomiting in the terminal stages of her illness, there was no evidence of any raised intracranial pressure. No autopsy was done.

The point has been made (Mahendra, 1981) that stupor in psychiatric practice was no longer to be simply attributed to "functional" causes and nowadays required neurological investigation.

Tumours of the corpus callosum have long held a fascination for neuropsychiatrists. Mental changes are more frequently observed in these tumours than with tumours anywhere else in the brain (Walton, 1977). Selecki (1964) pointed to the rapid mental deterioration before the appearance of neurological features. These changes consisted of progressive loss of recent memory, slowing down of mental and physical reactions, and poverty of movement and thought, progressing to dullness, apathy and depression.

I would like to thank Dr. R. M. Paxton, Consultant Neuroradiologist, Freedom Fields Hospital,

Plymouth, for reporting on the CT head scan of this patient.

B. MAHENDRA

*St Lawrence's Hospital,  
Bodmin, Cornwall PL31 2QT*

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**DST, Endocrines and Loss of Weight**

DEAR SIR,

We enjoyed reading the article by Berger *et al* (*Journal*, October 1984, **145**, 372–382) on the limited utility of the dexamethasone suppression test (DST) in psychiatry. Especially in North America the DST is widely used as a routine laboratory test for (endogenous) depression. However, some important confounding variables such as reduced caloric intake and catabolic state have been largely ignored in a one-track search for a biological marker. According to most diagnostic classification systems in psychiatry (including the DSM III) weight loss is a common symptom of (major) depression.

We have assessed the effects of weight loss (average 8 kg) in five healthy female subjects of normal weight in a starvation experiment during an initial baseline phase (A), a three week phase of complete food abstinence (B), a phase of weight gain (C) to the original level and a final baseline phase (D). Fasting resulted in a significant impairment of the HPA-function (elevation of 24-hour-plasma cortisol, increase of the time in secretory activity and increase of plasma cortisol half-life). Insufficient suppression of plasma-cortisol was observed after application of 1.5 mg dexamethasone at 11 pm, as shown in the Table. Whilst all DST's in the initial baseline phase were normal, seven out of 14 DST's showed insufficient suppression during the fasting phase (B) and all 11 DST's in the weight gain phase (C) were normal again. During the fasting phase there was also a clear reduction in the plasma dexamethasone levels at 9 am which may have caused insufficient cortisol suppression.

During fasting, basal TSH-values were significantly lowered and the TSH-response to TRH was blunted. Other hormonal axes showed disturbances as well: The growth hormone response to the alpha 2-adrenergic receptor agonist clonidine was blunted

TABLE  
Experimental phase

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	A vs B
DEX-CORTISOL ( $\mu\text{g}\%$ )	4 pm									
	$\bar{x}$	1.1	1.3	6.1	4.7	1.8	1.2	0.9	2.2	<.05*
	SD	0.1	0.1	3.2	1.4	0.0	0.2	0.8	2.3	
DEX-DEX ng/dl	9 am									
	$\bar{x}$	413	478	278	357	597	544	310	—	n.s.
	SD	290	233	105	197	317	308	243	—	
TRH-TSH	basal									
	$\bar{x}$	1.6	2.1	1.0	1.1	1.5	2.5	1.2	1.0	<.025§
	SD	0.8	1.5	0.5	0.3	0.8	1.2	0.5	0.3	
30 min	$\bar{x}$	12.8	14.4	8.5	8.7	14.0	14.7	12.7	11.1	<.01§
	SD	3.6	6.2	3.5	3.3	3.9	4.5	5.2	3.3	

\* = P-values, Wilcoxon Test (df = 4); § = paired t-Test (df = 3!); n.s. = non significant (df = 3!); DEX = Dexamethasone;  $\bar{x}$  = mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

after the weight gain phase (C) while the response was normal during the fasting phase. Fasting also resulted in a significant increase of the 24-hour growth hormone level, a regression to infantile secretion patterns of luteinizing hormone in three of five cases, and a decrease of plasma prolactin.

Disturbances in the HPA- and thyroid-axis have been described for depressed (and other mental) patients. Our findings in starving healthy normal weight subjects present strong evidence that weight loss, catabolic state or reduced caloric intake have a very powerful influence on neuroendocrine secretion and regulation. The HPA-axis appears to be particularly sensitive to the caloric intake and we feel that retrospective inquiry of patients concerning previous weight loss is clearly an insufficient control. Our results question the specificity of endocrine function tests such as the DST, TRH-test and clonidine test as biological markers for certain mental disorders such as (major) depression. We suggest that caloric intake and indicators of metabolic states (free fatty acids,  $\gamma$ -amino butyric acid) are used as controls in future neuroendocrine studies in mental patients.

M. M. FICHTER

University of Munich,  
Nussbaumstr. 7,  
8000 Munich 2, FRG

K. M. PIRKE

Max-Planck-Institute for Psychiatry,  
Kraepelinstr. 10,  
8000 Munich 40, FRG

#### Trazodone and Mania

DEAR SIR,

Apropos Roy-Byrne *et al's* comment (*Journal*, November 1984, 145, 543–550) that trazodone has not been reported to induce mania, I would like to draw attention to a recent report by Warren & Bick (1984). The latter reported two patients with a DSM-III diagnosis of major depressive disorder without previous history of mania, who developed manic features (again DSM-III diagnosed) after one week and one month of trazodone respectively.

I suspect that more such reports will be forthcoming as the use of trazodone becomes more prevalent.

ATUL C. PANDE

Victoria Hospital,  
375 South Street,  
London, Ontario,  
Canada

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