

Subjective cognitive complaints are frequent in young patients referred to a memory clinic

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Background: Subjective cognitive complaints (SCC) may be related to a higher risk of later cognitive decline and dementia or represent the very early phase of a neurodegenerative disease. SCC may also be related to a wide range of other conditions including depression. We set out to examine the quantity and profile of SCC in young patients as compared to elderly patients referred to a memory clinic. **Methods:** Patients were consecutively recruited from new referrals to the Copenhagen Memory Clinic and healthy controls were included from a population based study (Health2006). In total, 307 patients and 149 age-matched healthy controls were included. Patients were classified in 4 diagnostic groups: dementia, mild cognitive impairment, affective disorders and no cognitive impairment. Subjective memory was assessed with Subjective Memory Complaints (SMC) scale. Global cognitive functions were assessed with the Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE) and Addenbrooke's Cognitive Examination (ACE), and symptoms of depression were rated with Major Depression Inventory (MDI) prior to supplemental diagnostic investigations. All interviews and the diagnostic conclusion were blinded as to the SMC results. **Results:** In total, only 30% of young patients referred to our memory clinic were diagnosed with a dementia disorder, while 77% of the elderly patients were diagnosed with dementia. Young patients with dementia had significantly higher SMC total as compared to elderly patients with dementia. Young patients subsequently diagnosed with an affective disorder had the highest SMC total of all diagnostic groups. The age of the patients and MDI score (but not MMSE or ACE) had significant impact on the level of SCC. Young patients with dementia complained significantly more than elderly patients with dementia. **Conclusions:** In a memory clinic population young patients with affective disorders have more SCC than those with dementia or other conditions. In general, higher age and more depressive symptoms, but not the degree of cognitive impairment, were related to a higher SCC score. In patients diagnosed with a dementia disorder, SCC were more pronounced in the young than in the elderly, which may be related to differences in insight, family or occupational status, or diagnostic classification.