PARALLEL SESSION 2 – THURSDAY JUNE 20TH 2019, 17h45 – 19h15
Exploring new dimensions and treatment approaches for health anxiety

- M. Rimvall, et al.: Do Functional Somatic Symptoms and Health Anxiety Play a Role in Psychosis Development?
- D. Hoffmann, et al.: Internet-delivered psychological treatment for patients with health anxiety: Results from a randomized, controlled trial

Theme
Health anxiety is a serious and costly public health problem which is likely to develop a chronic course if left untreated. Unfortunately, many patients do not receive timely or proper treatment due to sparse treatment resources. Furthermore, existing treatment programs, though effective for many, do not work for all. Exploring new dimensions of the disorder could have important implications for the further development of preventive strategies and effective treatment. Also, treatment approaches which can increase access to specialized treatment are highly needed. The presentations in this symposium will discuss: i) an epidemiological perspective on the association between health anxiety and subclinical psychotic experiences in preadolescence, ii) the content and characteristics of autobiographical memories and episodic future thoughts in adults with severe health anxiety, iii) a new successful internet-based treatment approach, iv) the concept and assessment of health anxiety by proxy, where parents display health anxiety towards their children.

Takeaways
Learning points: 1. Health anxiety is associated with potential precursors to more severe types of psychopathology in young people, which calls for a broader clinical assessment at presentation. 2. Increased knowledge on autobiographical memory and episodic future thinking as maintaining cognitive factors for health anxiety may provide new avenues for better and more effective treatment. 3. Internet-delivered psychological treatment can increase access to evidence-based specialized treatment to more patients. 4. Health anxiety extending to significant others such as children may be an overlooked and undertreated clinical problem.

Chair: Charlotte Rask, Clinical Professor, Aarhus University Hospital, DK
Do Functional Somatic Symptoms and Health Anxiety Play a Role in Psychosis Development?

Aim
Features of functional somatic symptoms (FSS) and health anxiety (HA) are common in psychotic disorders as part of abnormal bodily sensations and delusional thought content. The current study aimed to examine the association between FSS and HA and subclinical psychotic experiences (PE) in preadolescence.

Methods
From the general population birth-cohort, the Copenhagen Child Cohort 2000 (CCC2000), 1572 children aged 11-12 participated in the current study. PE were assessed by clinicians using the Kiddie Schedule of Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia and self-reported HA and FSS were measured by the Child Illness Attitudes Scales and Child Somatization Inventory 24, respectively.

Results
After mutual adjustment and adjustment for general psychopathology, sex, puberty and chronic somatic illness, we found robust evidence for an association between PE and FSS (OR 3.3; 95% CI: 2.1–5.2) and HA (OR 2.2, 95%CI 1.4–3.4). These results were recently published (1).

Conclusion
A specific link between HA, FSS and PE was found in preadolescence, encouraging further research that can explore the hypothesis that FSS and HA might play a role in the development of severe mental disorders. Future studies of the CCC2000 will examine temporal trends of the associations between PE, HA and FSS.

Reference

Author(s)
Martin Rimvall 1,2 / Cecilia Pihl Jespersen 3 / Lars Clemmensen 1 / Anja Munkholm 1 / Anne Mette Skovgaard 4,5 / Frank Verhulst 1,2 / Jim Van Os 6,7,8 / Charlotte Ulrikka Rask 3,9 / Pia Jeppesen 1,2

P: Presenting author

Affiliation(s)
1. Mental Health Services, Capital Region of Denmark, Glostrup, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Center, Copenhagen, DK
2. Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Department of Clinical Medicine, Copenhagen, DK
3. Aarhus University Hospital, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Research Unit, Aarhus, DK
4. University of Copenhagen, Department of Public Health, Copenhagen, DK
5. University of Southern Denmark, National Institute of Public Health, Odense, DK
6. Brain Center Rudolf Magnus, University Medical Centre Utrecht, Department of Psychiatry, Utrecht, NL
7. Maastricht University Medical Centre, Department of Psychiatry and Psychology, Maastricht, NL
8. King’s College London, King’s Health Partners, Institute of Psychiatry, Department of Psychosis Studies, London, GB
9. Aarhus University, Department of Clinical Medicine, Aarhus, DK
Autobiographical memory and episodic future thinking in severe health anxiety: A comparison with obsessive-compulsive disorder

Aim
Autobiographical memory is affected in many mental disorders, but surprisingly little is known about the role of autobiographical memory in severe health anxiety, although memories of health threatening information that are rehearsed and readily available in the patient’s mind have been identified as possible maintaining factors.

Methods
This questionnaire study examined the content and characteristics of autobiographical memories and episodic future thoughts, as well as the frequency of involuntary autobiographical memories and future thoughts, in 32 patients diagnosed with severe health anxiety, 33 patients diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and 32 control participants.

Results
Compared to control participants the patient groups displayed similar patterns in the characteristics of the autobiographical events (e.g., more negative emotional valence, high vividness) and more maladaptive cognitive and behavioral strategies used when the events came to mind (e.g., rumination, avoidance). Importantly, patients with severe health anxiety reported more events related to their own illness or death, whereas patients with OCD reported engaging more in rituals when the events came to mind. Patients with severe health anxiety reported the same frequency of involuntary memories in daily life as the control participants, but a higher frequency of involuntary future thoughts than the control participants.

Conclusion
The results suggest an intensified response to all autobiographical events in the two clinical groups. The two patient groups reported more maladaptive cognitive and behavioral responses when the events came to mind, which could be a maintaining factor in these disorders. Episodic future thoughts could be particularly important in health anxiety.

Author(s)
Tine B. Gehrt ¹ / Lisbeth Frostholm ² / Marie-Louise Obermann ³,⁴ / Dorthe Berntsen ¹

P: Presenting author

Affiliation(s)
1. Aarhus University, Center on Autobiographical Memory Research, Aarhus, DK
2. Aarhus University Hospital, Research Clinic for Functional Disorders and Psychosomatics, Aarhus, DK
3. Aarhus University Hospital, Clinic for OCD and Anxiety Disorders, Aarhus, DK
4. Aarhus University Hospital, Center for Sexual Assault, Aarhus, DK
Internet-delivered psychological treatment for patients with health anxiety: results from a randomized, controlled trial

Aim
Health anxiety, or hypochondriasis, is a prevalent, costly and disabling disorder. Currently, few treatment options exist and access may be hampered by geographical distance, time and potential stigma. Therefore, easily accessible, evidence-based treatment is needed. The present study evaluated the efficacy of internet-delivered Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (iACT) for health anxiety in a randomized, controlled trial.

Methods
In total, 151 patients self-referred and 101 patients were included based on a videodiagnostic assessment by trained clinicians. Patients were randomized to 12 weeks of either iACT (n=53) or an internet-delivered discussion forum (iFORUM) (n=48). The primary outcome was between-group differences in health anxiety symptoms assessed by Whiteley-7 (range: 0-100) from baseline to 6-month follow-up using a linear mixed model. Cohen’s d was calculated for all outcome measures, and potential negative effects of treatment were summarized.

Results
Patients were primarily females (65%) with at least one comorbid psychiatric disorder (58%). A significant interaction effect of group and time was found on the primary outcome (chi2(5)=39.97, p<0.001) with an unadjusted mean difference of 19.0 points (95% CI 10.8 to 27.2, p<0.001). Additionally, a large effect was found on Whiteley-7 (d=0.80), and small to large effects on all secondary outcomes measuring symptoms of depression, anxiety, physical symptoms, illness worry and quality of life (d=0.31 to 0.95). Negative effects were common during treatment (e.g. experiencing more anxiety) but not associated to treatment completion or outcome at 6-MFU.

Conclusion
iACT can be an effective treatment for health anxiety. It may increase access to evidence-based treatment.

Author(s)
Ditte Hoffmann 1 / Charlotte Ulrikka Rask 2 / Erik Hedman-Lagerlöf 3 / Jens Søndergaard Jensen 1 / Lisbeth Frostholm 1

P: Presenting author

Affiliation(s)
1. Aarhus University Hospital, Research Clinic for Functional Disorders and Psychosomatics, Aarhus, DK
2. Aarhus University Hospital, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Research Unit, Aarhus, DK
3. Karolinska Institute, Department of Clinical Neuroscience, Stockholm, SE
Excessive parental worries for children's health: development and validation of a new measure

Aim
This study aims to develop and preliminary validate an assessment tool for parents with health anxiety (HA) by proxy: The HA by Proxy Scale (HAPYS). HA by proxy refers to excessive parental worries about their child’s health and fears that serious illness in the child is being overlooked. Exposure to parental maladaptive illness perception and behavior is suggested as a risk factor for development of health anxiety in young people. HA by proxy may be an important but overlooked clinical problem.

Methods
The development of the HAPYS is performed in collaboration with patients and clinical and research experts. Six parents with HA by proxy will be interviewed. Qualitative analysis will be performed to conceptualize HA by proxy and develop the HAPYS from an existing non-validated and preliminary questionnaire. Subsequently, the HAPYS will be tested for face-validity with five new and three of the previous participants with HA by proxy. Then, the psychometric properties of the HAPYS will be further investigated in a study including 250 parents with different health status.

Results
The overall design of the project will be presented together with the results from the developmental phase of the measure based on patient interviews. The larger validation of the HAPYS is expected to be completed in 2019-2020.

Conclusion
This is the first larger research project on HA by proxy. The new measure, HAPYS, is expected to become an integrated part of assessment of HA. Hopefully it will bring a larger focus on parents’ illness-related anxiety towards their children.

Author(s)
Katrine Ingeman Beck ¹ / Ditte Hoffmann ² / Lisbeth Frostholm ² / Kristi Wright ³ / Charlotte Ulrikka Rask ¹

P: Presenting author

Affiliation(s)
1. Aarhus University Hospital, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Research Unit, Aarhus, DK
2. Aarhus University Hospital, Research Clinic for Functional Disorders and Psychosomatics, Aarhus, DK
3. University of Regina, Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Regina, CA