

SPOTLIGHT

on... neuropsychiatrist



Q&A with Professor Eileen Joyce, Professor of Neuropsychiatry at The Institute of Neurology, University College London

Tourettes Action interviewed Prof. Eileen Joyce to find out how a neuropsychiatrist can be of support to someone with Tourette Syndrome.

Can you please define what neuropsychiatry is?

A neuropsychiatrist is a trained and qualified psychiatrist who specialises in the assessment and management of people who have neurological symptoms/disorders, and where there are psychological/psychiatric difficulties. For example, adult neuropsychiatrists often see people with Parkinson's disease or epilepsy who frequently develop depression or anxiety.

What is the role of a neuropsychiatrist to someone who suspects they have TS or is already diagnosed with the condition?

In adults, if somebody suspects they may have Tourette's syndrome, a neuropsychiatrist with sufficient experience with TS can make the diagnosis. If there is doubt s/he can refer to a neurologist colleague who specialises in movement disorders for a second opinion. A neuropsychiatrist can discuss and advise about the various treatment options for

tics; s/he can prescribe and monitor medications and refer to other services for psychological therapy and/or botulinum toxin therapy. One of the most important roles of a neuropsychiatrist in a Tourette's service is to assess and help treat any accompanying mental health problems. These include OCD, ADHD, anxiety and depression.

Do neuropsychiatrists provide therapy as well as prescribing medication?

It depends on the expertise and training of the individual neuropsychiatrist, but in general they do not provide the therapy themselves. They are able to assess the type of therapy that might be helpful, for example habit reversal for tics, cognitive behavioural therapy for OCD, anxiety and depression; and then make the referral to the appropriate service. Therapy is usually provided by specially trained therapists.

Why does Tourette syndrome fall under the medical specialism of psychiatry when it is a neurological condition?

Interestingly, in the World Health Organisation ICD10 classification of medical disorders, tic disorders are classified under 'Mental and Behavioural Disorders' where psychiatric conditions are listed. This year (2018) the new ICD11 version will have tic disorders classified under 'Diseases of the Nervous System' where neurological disorders are listed. This illustrates the grey area of whether TS is thought of as a psychiatric or neurological problem. Practically speaking, whether an individual with TS is helped by a neurologist or psychiatrist will depend on the clinical need. TS is a movement disorder and therefore neurological. Adults with TS are often referred to neurologists who are happy to manage tics themselves and this arrangement may also be preferred by the individual concerned. However, TS is frequently accompanied by the co-morbidities of OCD and ADHD which are considered psychiatric. In addition, people with TS may develop other psychiatric disorders, such as anxiety and depression, secondary to the effect of tics on their lives. Psychiatrists, because of their general training and bio-psycho-social approach, are better equipped to assess and treat these co-morbid conditions. For example, OCD or general anxiety may turn out to be more problematic for the daily life of the individual than their tics and treatment may have a beneficial effect not only on anxiety but also their tic management because of stress reduction. Neuropsychiatrists are more confident in prescribing and monitoring ant-tic medications as they are more familiar with them than neurologists; they are also used to prescribing several different medications together, if needed, and monitoring their side effects. Finally, neuropsychiatrists work closely with therapists and often work within teams where there is therapy available; they are able to assess whether a particular type of therapy would be helpful for an individual, e.g. habit reversal for tics, cognitive behaviour therapy for anxiety and depression, and make the referral as appropriate.

Why might a person seeking a TS diagnosis get referred to a psychiatrist rather than a neurologist? Can a person be referred to a psychiatrist for their TS without having any significant mental health challenges?

It depends on the local resource. For adults, people with TS are more often referred to neurologists than general psychiatrists. There are a few dedicated services for TS in which neurologists and neuropsychiatrists work together. Referrals to these are often restricted due to issues with funding. Only the service at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery is open to everybody but recently this has become restricted to referrals from England only. Prior funding agreement is required from Wales and N Ireland and Scotland has its own system. It would be unusual for a person with TS and no psychiatric comorbidities to be referred to a general psychiatrist but they may be referred to a dedicated Tourette service which is run by a neuropsychiatrist.

How do people get referred to a neuropsychiatrist?

There are not many neuropsychiatrists in the UK. Most regional neurosciences in the UK should have access to a neuropsychiatrist - there are 27 in the UK. Each neuroscience centre is linked to a local hospital where there are neurologists but not usually neuropsychiatrists. That is why adults with tic are usually firstly referred to a neurologist who then could refer them to a local neuropsychiatrist.

About Professor Eileen Joyce

Professor Joyce obtained her first degree, PhD and medical degree from the University of Cambridge. She trained in psychiatry at the Bethlem and Maudsley Hospitals and spent several years as a research worker at the Institute of Psychiatry, where she was a Wellcome Trust Lecturer in Mental Health, and the USA National Institutes of Health. Before moving to UCL/UCLH, she was Professor of Neuropsychiatry at Imperial College London. Professor Joyce is on Tourettes Action's list of consultants offering specialist

experience in diagnosing and treating Tourette Syndrome.

If you would like a copy of the Tourettes Action consultants list please contact the helpdesk.

RESOURCES

Contact Tourettes Action for a list of consultants specialising in the diagnosis and treatment of TS.

Helpdesk phone: 0300 777 8427

Helpdesk email: help@tourettes-action.org.uk