Severity of core symptoms in first episode schizophrenia and long-term remission

Carlo Marchesi a,b,⁎, Andrea Affaticati b, Alberto Monici b, Chiara De Panfilis a,b, Paolo Ossola a, Matteo Tonna b

a Department of Neuroscience, Psychiatric Unit, University of Parma, Parma, Italy
b Mental Health Department, Local Health Service, Parma, Italy

A R T I C L E  I N F O
Article history:
Received 6 November 2013
Received in revised form 7 October 2014
Accepted 3 November 2014
Available online 11 November 2014

Keywords:
First-episode schizophrenia
Long-term remission
Core symptoms

A B S T R A C T
A definable concept of symptomatic remission in schizophrenia has been proposed by the Remission in Schizophrenia Working Group (RSWG). Nevertheless no studies to date assessed eventual differences in core symptoms at onset between remitters and non-remitters. The present study evaluated whether the severity of core symptoms differed among 48 patients with first episode schizophrenia (FES), and whether it predicted long-term (16-years) remission. Particularly, the present study aimed to verify if RSWG remission criteria might identify a sub-group of patients with mild core symptoms at their first episode. In the present study the severity of core symptoms was significantly lower in remitted than in non-remitted patients; interestingly, five out of the eight core symptoms already satisfied the severity criteria for remission in most remitted patients. Among the core symptoms only the severity of social withdrawal predicted the long-term outcome, while age at onset, duration of untreated psychosis and employment status did not exert any effect. Concluding, patients with FES presenting, mild core symptoms, particularly low negative symptoms, were more likely to reach long-term remission. Therefore, RSWG remission criteria seem to identify a subgroup of FES patients with mild severe core symptoms so with a higher probability to reach remission.

© 2014 Elsevier Ireland Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Since the description of dementia praecox (Kraepelin, 1899), schizophrenia has been conceptualized as a chronic illness and remission has long been considered largely impossible, with the consequence that diagnosis and prognosis were viewed as essentially the same (McGlashan, 2008). However, in the recent years the Remission in Schizophrenia Working Group (RSWG) (Andreasen et al., 2005) posited that “symptomatic remission is a definable concept and an achievable stage in the treatment of schizophrenia” and proposed criteria for symptomatic remission. According to such criteria, remission is defined as: “a state in which patients have experienced an improvement in core symptoms, to the extent that these symptoms no longer interfere significantly with daily life”. Core symptoms are those perceived as diagnostically characteristics for the condition, and eight items of the Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS) were proposed for their evaluation. Remission is achieved if all eight items are rated as mild (Andreasen et al., 2005).

According to these criteria a substantial proportion of patients with schizophrenia (45–70%) (Lambert et al., 2010) can be defined as remitters at some point during the course of their illness. However, patients who eventually reach the RSWG remission condition may be highly heterogeneous. For instance, remitted patients could have shown, at illness onset, a different severity of the core symptoms when compared to patients who will not achieve remission, even though no studies have specifically investigated this topic.

Therefore, the present study aimed to evaluate whether 1) patients with first episode schizophrenia (FES) who gained remission after several years of illness differed from non-remitters with respect to the severity of the core symptoms, and 2) which of the core symptoms predicted long-term remission. Particularly, we aimed to verify if RSWG remission criteria identified a sub-group of patients with mild core symptoms at their first episode.

2. Methods

The study protocol was approved by the local ethic committee. This study is a part of a more extensive evaluation of outcome in patients with a first psychotic
analyses. Statistical significance was calculated for the diagnosis of schizophrenia (baseline: k=0.92; follow-up: k=0.95) and for the PANSS core symptoms scores (baseline: k=0.72–0.86; follow-up: k=0.73–0.90). The clinical and socio-demographic features were compared in R and in NR using two-tailed Student’s t-test for continuous variables and Fischer’s exact test for categorical variables. Lastly, a logistic regression analysis (a stepwise method) was applied to evaluate whether core symptoms severity at baseline together with gender, age at onset, DUP and working status (independent variables) predicted the remission status at follow-up (dependent variable: R vs NR). The statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 20 version was used for the analyses. Statistical significance was set at the level of p ≤ 0.05.

3. Results

3.1. Sample

During the period of recruitment, 75 patients with FES were consecutively admitted to the Psychiatric Clinic. Twenty-seven patients were not included in the study: eight were lost at follow-up; three refused to be re-evaluated; 16 were non-adherent to the monthly visits or treatment and therefore they were excluded from the study. The remaining 48 patients participated in the study and were re-evaluated in 2010.

The SCID-IV re-administration confirmed the diagnosis of schizophrenia in all 48 patients. None of them was using illicit drugs.

Eighteen patients (37.5%) satisfied the remission RSWG criteria (R), while the remaining 30 patients (62.5%) did not (NR). Among remitted patients, three of them (16.7%) were in complete symptomatic recovery, nine (50%) showed minimal symptom severity and six (33.3%) had mild symptom severity at follow-up.

The socio-demographics and clinical features at baseline were reported in Table 1.

At the follow-up R and NR patients showed similar age (R: 40.5 ± 9.8 yrs; NR: 44.8 ± 11.7 yrs) (t=1.3; p=0.19) and duration of illness (R: 16.6 ± 4.8 yrs; NR: 16.3 ± 5.1 yrs) (t=0.1; p=0.85), while the number of psychotic episodes requiring hospitalization were higher in NR (3.6 ± 1.0) than in R (2.2 ± 0.6) (t=4.7; p < 0.001).

3.2. Core symptoms severity

At baseline, the severity of core symptoms was lower in R than in NR (Table 1). Furthermore, the severity criterion for remission (item score ≤ 3) was already satisfied for unusual thought content, blunted affect and social withdrawal more frequently in R than in NR patients. Lastly, five out of the eight core symptoms already satisfied the severity criterion for remission in most R patients (n=11; 61%) but only in a minority of NR patients (n=3; 10%).

3.3. Core symptoms severity and prediction of remission

At baseline, among the core symptoms only the severity of social withdrawal predicted the long-term outcome: this core symptom was negatively associated with remission status at follow-up (β = -2.1; wald=11.7; OR=0.11; CI 95%: 0.03–0.40; p=0.001). Moreover, gender, age at onset, DUP and working status did not exert any effect on long-term symptomatic remission.

4. Discussion

In the present study patients with schizophrenia were evaluated with the PANSS at their first episode of illness and 16 years thereafter.

At the time of their first episode of illness, patients who reached remission during the follow-up (R patients), showed a lower severity of almost all core symptoms than NR; in fact, only the severity of hallucinations and conceptual disorganization was comparable in R and in NR. Interestingly, if applying the severity criteria of the RSWG at the first episode, most of the core symptoms (unusual thought content, mannerisms, conceptual disorganization, blunted affect and social withdrawal) would have already satisfied such criteria in the majority (50–88%) of R patients, whereas only mannerism would have satisfied this criterion in most (53%) NR. In other words, in R patients the first episode was mainly characterized by delusions, hallucinations and...
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات