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Cognitive Performance in Drug-naïve First Episode Schizophrenia (FES) Patients

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Introduction: A majority of the studies on cognition in schizophrenia have been conducted in drug-treated patients. In healthy subjects, administration of antipsychotic medication has been found to have a negative impact on cognitive performance in domains such as speed of processing and attention. Antipsychotic drugs occupy the D2-dopamine receptor, a receptor subtype that has been related to cognitive function. Studies employing Positron Emission Tomography have shown that poor performance in several cognitive domains is associated to low D2-receptor binding. It is therefore crucial to examine cognition in drug-naïve patients with schizophrenia.

Objectives: In FES patients: To examine the profile of cognitive impairments in the absence of antipsychotic medication and compare with the cognitive profile of patients who are on antipsychotic medication.

Aims: To study cognition in FES.

Methods: The Measurement and Treatment Research to Improve Cognition in Schizophrenia (MATRICS) battery was administered to 60 patients with early schizophrenia and 30 healthy controls, 50% of the patients were drug-naïve. This research is ongoing and a part of the Karolinska Schizophrenia Project (KaSP), a multidisciplinary research consortium that examines the pathophysiology of schizophrenia.

Results: Preliminary findings show that patients perform worse than healthy controls in all cognitive domains, with no significant differences between drug-naïve and medicated patients. Attention and Visual memory were the domains with the greatest impairments. The results are compared with our previous meta-analytic findings in drug-naïve patients.

Conclusion: These preliminary findings confirm the existence of cognitive impairments at the early stage of schizophrenia in the absence of antipsychotic medication.