

Review Article Summary

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Summary on the review article: Functional neurological disorder: new subtypes and shared mechanisms, by Mark Hallett, Selma Aybek, Barbara A Dworetzky, Laura McWhirter, Jeffrey P Staab, and Jon Stone.

Functional neurological disorder (FND) is commonly seen in neurological practice and refers to clinical syndromes consisting of signs and symptoms of genuinely experienced alterations in motor, sensory, or cognitive performance. The main pathophysiological processes comprise altered functioning of brain networks rather than abnormalities of brain structures. While FND is perhaps one of the oldest functional disorders and has long been recognized, unfortunately it was also largely neglected by medical curricula and healthcare professionals. In addition, FND carries a substantial historical burden and is still heavily stigmatized. Unsurprisingly, for these reasons FND has been labeled a “crisis” in neurology and psychiatry’s “blind spot”, and rightly so.

Thankfully, in the past few decades we have seen a fundamental renaissance of clinical and research interest, as well as crucial breakthroughs regarding diagnostic and therapeutic concepts in FND. Key breakthroughs include an emerging new standard of care that is rooted in the biopsychosocial model, as well as emerging pathophysiological models that elucidate the mechanisms underlying FND. Importantly, the research community has witnessed several inspired collaborative efforts, and is now flourishing with a new international FND society (www.fndsociety.org). From being ignored in the past medical curricula, FND is now finding its way into neurology training curricula and textbooks for medical students.

In their latest work, an exquisite and comprehensive review published last month in the *Lancet Neurology*, professor Mark Hallett and his co-authors emphasize several of the points mentioned above, and discuss the most common presentations of FND, namely functional seizures and functional movement disorders. They also cover persistent perceptual postural dizziness and functional cognitive disorder. In their review, they discuss the different FND subtypes in an informative and intuitive way, discussing the epidemiology, followed by the etiology, pathophysiology, and treatment of FND. What’s particularly appealing about this review is that it discusses each FND subtype separately as well as how these subtypes relate to FND in general, in a nuanced and evidence-based way. In this regard, they discuss possible shared mechanisms and distinguishing processes, and importantly note that individuals with FND often have more than one subtype, or alternate from one to another over time. They also touch on the important subject of distinguishing FND from feigning, which unfortunately has led to substantial stigma surrounding this condition and remains a pertinent issue in this field.

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One of many key insights in this review is that the fundamental pathophysiology of functional seizures, functional movement disorders, persistent perceptual postural dizziness, and functional cognitive disorder can be considered in a similar way. Along with a concise account of the pathophysiological mechanisms, there are very useful figures, panels, and tables which helps build intuition and helps interested readers better understand key features of FND. Being the most recent work on FND subtypes, as well as being concisely written by the leading experts in this field, this review is thus highly recommended as a resource for interested parties to get a complete account of FND and to get a better appreciation of the shared and distinctive features of the main FND subtypes.

Hallett M, Aybek S, Dworetzky BA, McWhirter L, Staab JP, Stone J. Functional neurological disorder: New subtypes and shared mechanisms. *The Lancet Neurology*. 2022;21(6):537-550. doi:10.1016/s1474-4422(21)00422-1