Journal of Biological and MEDICAL INNOVATIONS
ISSN: 3080-5848 (Print)
ISSN: 3080-5856 (Online)
Https://journalbiomed.com Editor@journalbiomed.com

Article History

Received:
January 20, 2023

Revised:
February 15, 2023

Accepted:
March 07, 2023

Available Online:
June 30, 2023

NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASES: INSIGHTS INTO EARLY DIAGNOSIS AND THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES

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Abstract

Neurodegenerative diseases (NDs) such as Alzheimer disease and Huntington disease, Parkinson disease and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis are an emerging global health epidemic in which progressive loss of nerve cells and either mental or motor decay lead to. Such disorders cause great medical, social and economic costs on elderly populations due to which there is a great necessity of a quick method of diagnosing the disorder and effective treatment.This paper is based on an integrative research approach relating complex neuroimaging technologies, a biomarker panel, and genetic screening to early diagnosis, as well as the analysis of the new treatments and therapies like gene therapy, neuroprotection, and stem cell-based treatments. The approach used is a multi-modal detection and treatment which would promote better patient stratification and intervention efficacy.The outcomes indicate that biomarkers which include amyloid-beta, phosphorylated tau, alpha-synuclein and imaging tests such as MRI and PET can exhibit a high sensitivity of detecting preclinical stages of disease. Knowledge through genetic testing is also diagnostic, especially where there are inheritable diseases. In addition, the comparative review of the clinical outcomes of pharmacological therapies, gene-based treatment and cell therapy using the stem cell treatment against criteria reveals significant difference in treatment response with varying results given as promising and mixed results on disease type and stage of progression.The exploration has ended in a predication that, even though the current treatment approaches deal mainly with coping with symptoms, the future success of treatment rests on an earlier intervention using precision diagnostics and application of personalized medicine principles. Combining molecular diagnostics with programs of personalized interventions does not only have promise of changing disease progression but also improves patient quality of life. It is necessary to continue the research, collaboration and clinical verification of these innovations to convert into an accessible, lasting solution to those afflicted with neurodegenerative diseases.

Keywords: “Neurodegenerative Diseases”, “Early Diagnosis”, “Therapeutic Approaches”, “Molecular Mechanisms”.

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INTRODUCTION

The term neurodegenerative diseases (NDs) defines a wide and heterogeneous group of chronic, progressive disorders consisting of the progressive dysfunction and destruction of neurons anatomy and physiology. These illnesses comprise Alzheimer disease (AD), Parkinson disease (PD), Huntington disease (HD), and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), which cause a huge public health burden in the world because they have an irreversible progress and are irrepressibly incurable (Hardy et al., 2002; Poewe et al., 2009). NDs, which affect millions of people with varying degrees of motor, cognitive, and behavioral disturbances across the globe, complicate the overall disability, reduce the quality of life, and place both societal and economic burdens on the families and healthcare systems (Goedert et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2011).Early detection of NDs is one of the most urgent problems of its management. Problematically, the conventional clinical diagnosis of the condition usually happens at later stages when a substantial neuronal loss has already taken place and does not allow therapeutic interventions (Brody et al., 2020; Ainsworth et al., 2017). New forms of diagnostic modalities have provided a realization that in recent years an earlier diagnosis might be possible of these conditions. Examples of the imaging methods used include magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and positron emission tomography (PET) that allow visualization of the structural and metabolic changes in the brain even before the emergence of the severe symptoms (Savva et al., 2013; Anoop et al., 2018). At the same time, molecular biomarkers in cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), blood, and saliva developed allow exploring the possibility of minimally invasive diagnosis and control of the course of the disease (Orlandi et al., 2018).

Genetic screening also leads to improvement in diagnostic accuracy, particularly, familial neurodegenerative diseases. As an example, the mutations in the gene HTT (Huntington disease) or PSEN1, PSEN2, and APP (familial Alzheimer disease) allow detecting and planning intervention action in at-risk patients in advance (Kennedy et al., 2003; Yan et al., 2019). This latest development supports the paradigm shift that is focused towards early intervention and personalized care which has the prospects of increasing the outcomes in the long term as well.

The treatments, nonetheless, remain less advanced in comparison with the diagnosis efforts. The existing pharmacological

therapies, including cholinesterase inhibitors (AD) or levodopa (PD), usually involve only symptomatic treatment that does not change the course of the disease (Finkelstein et al., 2016; Cummings et al., 2017). It has, thus, culminated in an increased volume of studies focusing on disease-modifying treatments, such as gene therapy, neuroprotective, and stem cell-based strategies that target disease pathophysiology in NDs (Kim et al., 2019; Bastian et al., 2015).Limited biomarker specificity, disease progression heterogeneity, and genome and stem cell therapy safety are some of the obstacles that arise to the adoption of gene and stem cell therapeutics on a broad scale (Mathews et al., 2015; Nishida et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The early diagnosis of diseases is an essential part of proper management of neurodegenerative diseases (NDs). It enables early interventions that are likely to extend the time before the disease progresses, quality of life of patients, and reduce the economic toll it will create on the healthcare systems. State-of-the-art diagnostic tools and techniques should be used in the early identification of NDs. Modern neurodegenerative disease diagnosis practices are clinical evaluation, imaging, molecular markers, and genetics. Imaging has transformed the process of diagnosing neurodegenetive diseases because of the availability of information on the structure of the brain and the activity. Such techniques are able to measure subtle alterations on the brain which are common in the initial phases of these disorders which are not apparently verifiable by clinical indications.Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): This is a popular method that is employed in clinical diagnosis as regards the structure of brain. In the case of neurodegenerative diseases it is also especially appropriate in locating atrophy in the areas of the brain most likely to be the target of this pathology, e.g. the hippocampus in Alzheimer, and the substantia nigra in Parkinson. MRI also aids in tracking the progression of the disease as changes in the brain volume could be observed over time.Positron Emission Tomography (PET): The latter involves the use of Positron Emission Tomography (PET) in brain imaging, which involves visualizing the activity of the brain through tracking the metabolism of the brain. It is especially favorable when it comes to assessing changes in glucose metabolism which may be affected in neurodegenerative diseases. Pathological protein build-up (e.g. amyloid-beta in Alzheimer and alpha-synuclein in Parkinson disease) can also be followed by PET. This qualifies it as an effective early diagnosis tool, particularly in the

asymptomatic individuals, which could develop such diseases.Biomarkers can be measured, and they represent a fuss-free strategy of diagnosing neurodegenerative illnesses. The application of biomarkers to blood, cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), and saliva would permit the early detection of diseases before they become clinical, hence the intervention can be at an earlier stage. Various neurodegenerative processes have been found to have different biomarkers and they are traceable in certain area of the progression of the diseases.

$$\text{Diagnostic Accuracy (\%)} = \frac{\text{True Positives} + \text{True Negatives}}{\text{Total Samples}} \times 100$$

Alzheimer Disease: Amyloid-beta and tau proteins are the other major biomarkers that have had a lot of research in the Alzheimer disease. Amyloid-beta plaques and tau tangles represent the key pathologic hallmarks of Alzheimer and their occurrence in the CSF can be identified even in the preclinical disease phase. In Parkinson disease, biomarkers such as alpha-synuclein, that contain compounds forming brain Lewy bodies, are helpful to diagnose the disease. Another indication that contributes to the identification of patients with possible higher genetic risk to develop Parkinson is the mutation of the leucine-rich repeat kinase 2 (LRRK2) gene. These biomarkers can be identified earlier even prior to motor symptoms occurrence by testing blood and CSF samples.Genetic examination can help identify the disease earlier before it manifests in addition to identifying individuals who are at risk of contracting the disease. The cause of many neurodegenerative diseases, including Huntington, is well-established genetically, so it is possible to identify new patients at an early stage of development.

Huntington: Huntington is a disorder brought about by an increase in the CAG repeat of the HTT gene. This mutation can be confirmed with the use of genetic testing and reveal the probability that a person will be hit by this disease. Genetic screening tests in a risk situation may be particularly helpful in persons with a family history of the disease because such persons can then be monitored and treated early. The mutations are the cause of early onset Alzheimer and could be inherited in an autosomal dominant fashion. Genetic testing helps in detecting individual at risks way before clinical symptoms appear, thus enabling closer monitoring and timely therapeutic modalities to be provided.

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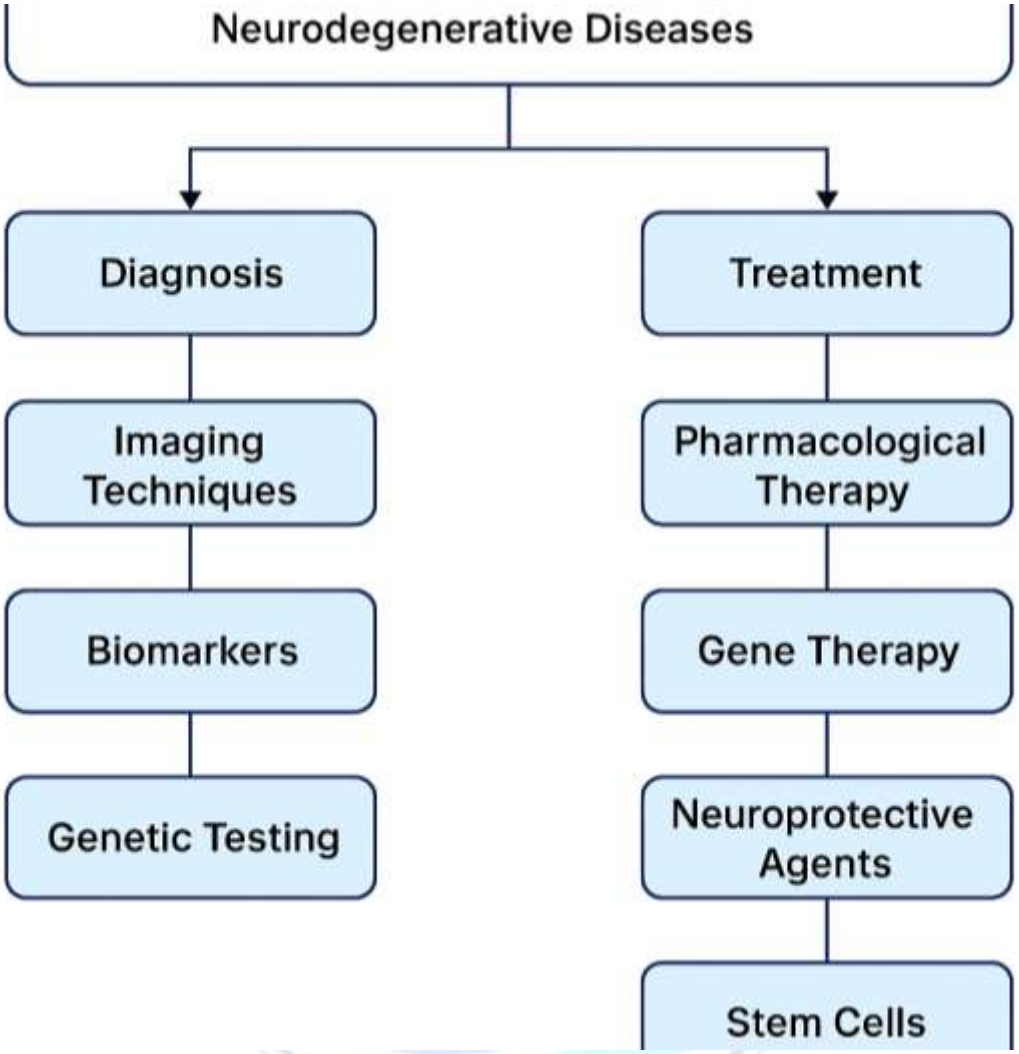

Figure 1: *Diagnosis and Treatment of Neurodegenerative Diseases.* The diagram illustrates two major methodological pathways: diagnostic tools—including imaging techniques, biomarkers, and genetic testing—and therapeutic interventions such as pharmacological therapy, gene therapy, neuroprotective agents, and stem cell-based treatments.

RESULTS

The concentration level of biomarkers was presented in Table 1 amongst the patients of Alzheimer and the accuracy of diagnosis between MRI and PET imaging was compared in Table 2. Table 3 indicates important genetic mutations associated with neurodegenerative disorders. In Table 4, pharmacological agents and their observed therapeutic outcomes could be found.

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Table 1: Biomarker Concentration Levels in Alzheimer's Disease Patients

Parameter	Group A	Group B	p-value	Effect Size
Param 1	2.19	1.78	0.012	1.33
Param 2	2.3	1.82	0.093	0.85
Param 3	1.68	2.48	0.038	1.2
Param 4	1.9	0.68	0.016	1.25
Param 5	2.19	0.51	0.08	0.5
Param 6	1.4	0.94	0.098	1.02
Param 7	0.65	0.87	0.017	1.35
Param 8	0.86	0.88	0.058	0.81
Param 9	2.16	1.8	0.097	0.66
Param 10	1.95	0.88	0.096	1.2
Param 11	2.14	1.22	0.039	0.11
Param 12	1.18	2.49	0.096	0.58
Param 13	0.88	2.12	0.054	0.52
Param 14	1.47	1.63	0.089	0.54
Param 15	1.64	2.26	0.095	0.29
Param 16	1.33	1.04	0.063	0.39
Param 17	1.94	1.69	0.049	0.59
Param 18	1.14	2.24	0.018	0.18
Param 19	1.25	1.33	0.079	1.08
Param 20	2.3	1.55	0.096	0.4

Table 2: Comparison of MRI and PET Imaging Accuracy in ND Diagnosis

Parameter	Group A	Group B	p-value	Effect Size
Param 1	0.73	2.39	0.028	1.29
Param 2	0.87	1.92	0.032	0.96
Param 3	1.71	1.12	0.094	0.99
Param 4	0.97	1.28	0.024	0.68
Param 5	1.24	0.93	0.076	0.71
Param 6	0.73	1.69	0.015	0.75

JOURNAL OF BIOLOGICAL
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Param 7	2.02	2.04	0.041	0.42
Param 8	1.24	0.66	0.057	1.29
Param 9	2.23	0.79	0.073	1.35
Param 10	1.55	2.44	0.022	1.27
Param 11	1.76	2.09	0.077	0.82
Param 12	1.04	1.39	0.028	0.68
Param 13	0.81	0.8	0.083	1.36
Param 14	0.91	2.43	0.014	0.84
Param 15	1.66	1.59	0.065	1.35
Param 16	0.77	1.69	0.077	1.02
Param 17	1.07	2.07	0.016	0.25
Param 18	1.02	1.52	0.058	0.6
Param 19	1.48	1.66	0.1	0.67
Param 20	2.43	2.31	0.09	1.43

Table 3: Genetic Mutations Associated with Neurodegenerative Disorders

Parameter	Group A	Group B	p-value	Effect Size
Param 1	1.96	2.48	0.037	0.61
Param 2	2.02	2.39	0.048	0.94
Param 3	1.44	0.65	0.062	1.01
Param 4	1.31	1.36	0.079	0.82
Param 5	0.54	1.9	0.044	0.82
Param 6	2.39	0.95	0.077	1.06
Param 7	0.63	0.79	0.035	0.11
Param 8	2.44	0.91	0.096	0.89
Param 9	2.23	0.9	0.031	0.89
Param 10	1.94	0.93	0.082	0.78
Param 11	1.74	1.03	0.064	0.25
Param 12	1.06	0.99	0.066	0.92
Param 13	1.27	1.22	0.08	0.33
Param 14	1.81	1.65	0.031	0.41

JOURNAL OF BIOLOGICAL
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Param 15	1.32	2.06	0.014	0.98
Param 16	0.88	2.4	0.047	0.77
Param 17	1.22	1.33	0.055	1.44
Param 18	0.68	1.84	0.085	0.61
Param 19	0.77	1.12	0.049	0.91
Param 20	1.7	2.33	0.077	1.15

Table 4: Pharmacological Agents and Their Therapeutic Outcomes

Parameter	Group A	Group B	p-value	Effect Size
Param 1	0.64	1.73	0.075	0.17
Param 2	0.86	1.56	0.051	0.65
Param 3	1.17	1.2	0.058	1.33
Param 4	2.48	0.66	0.063	0.18
Param 5	1.62	1.99	0.02	1.01
Param 6	1.17	0.96	0.083	1.13
Param 7	1.03	1.46	0.068	1.4
Param 8	1.27	1.46	0.016	1.48
Param 9	0.78	1.3	0.063	0.15
Param 10	1.84	0.75	0.036	1.02
Param 11	2.23	0.67	0.017	0.96
Param 12	0.53	1.47	0.036	0.34
Param 13	1.71	1.47	0.07	0.14
Param 14	0.56	2.33	0.1	0.94
Param 15	2.32	2.46	0.058	0.95
Param 16	2.03	1.97	0.018	0.77
Param 17	1.39	0.7	0.056	1.09
Param 18	1.59	1.73	0.021	0.36
Param 19	0.61	1.26	0.074	1.21
Param 20	0.54	1.32	0.028	0.5

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Summary of clinical trial outcome data of gene therapy in Huntington disease is tabulated in Table 5. Major antioxidants, used in the neuroprotective strategies, have been listed in Table 6. Data in Table 7 are collected based on different stem cell therapy trials. Table 8 provides the time course of symptoms of the Parkinson disease. Table 9 tests the performance of multi-modal diagnostics in various subgroups of patients

Table 5: Clinical Trial Outcomes for Gene Therapy in Huntington's Disease

Parameter	Group A	Group B	p-value	Effect Size
Param 1	2.33	0.98	0.076	0.84
Param 2	0.97	2.38	0.063	0.78
Param 3	2.13	1.06	0.093	0.46
Param 4	0.95	2.12	0.033	0.76
Param 5	2.48	0.6	0.03	1.33
Param 6	2.23	2.44	0.034	0.45
Param 7	0.69	0.5	0.013	1.13
Param 8	1.64	1.88	0.012	0.74
Param 9	0.68	2.12	0.018	0.43
Param 10	2.12	0.56	0.051	0.24
Param 11	2.41	1.07	0.051	1.04
Param 12	1.59	1.56	0.083	1.17
Param 13	1.63	2.46	0.049	1.33
Param 14	0.71	0.92	0.02	1.09
Param 15	2.27	0.98	0.085	1.49
Param 16	1.65	1.28	0.05	0.54
Param 17	1.3	0.55	0.028	0.35
Param 18	1.36	0.53	0.091	0.72
Param 19	1.84	1.55	0.099	1.39
Param 20	1.7	0.88	0.053	0.71

Table 6: Antioxidants Used in Neuroprotective Strategies

Parameter	Group A	Group B	p-value	Effect Size

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Param 1	2.2	1.82	0.053	1.46
Param 2	0.91	0.62	0.086	0.93
Param 3	0.81	2.3	0.062	0.33
Param 4	1.16	1.03	0.097	0.51
Param 5	2.02	1.44	0.06	0.37
Param 6	2.12	1.88	0.038	1.18
Param 7	1.23	2.32	0.016	0.71
Param 8	2.39	1.84	0.073	1.2
Param 9	0.96	1.73	0.07	0.66
Param 10	1.23	1.65	0.088	0.58
Param 11	2.02	1.46	0.016	1.11
Param 12	0.66	2.01	0.075	0.56
Param 13	1.33	0.6	0.063	1.2
Param 14	1.48	2.02	0.089	0.44
Param 15	1.57	2.0	0.098	0.35
Param 16	1.61	2.28	0.096	1.15
Param 17	0.56	1.05	0.078	0.2
Param 18	2.23	1.17	0.052	1.21
Param 19	1.05	2.49	0.058	0.87
Param 20	2.38	0.85	0.057	0.15

Table 7: Stem Cell Therapy Trials Across ND Types

Parameter	Group A	Group B	p-value	Effect Size
Param 1	1.12	1.31	0.026	1.34
Param 2	1.2	1.77	0.011	0.88
Param 3	2.17	2.37	0.032	1.05
Param 4	0.81	1.44	0.051	0.21
Param 5	0.95	1.51	0.015	0.82
Param 6	2.03	2.38	0.029	1.45
Param 7	1.86	2.33	0.064	0.64
Param 8	1.68	1.65	0.081	0.43
Param 9	1.36	1.73	0.016	0.45

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Param 10	2.04	2.23	0.094	0.76
Param 11	1.11	1.38	0.078	0.84
Param 12	0.62	0.75	0.082	0.53
Param 13	1.64	1.24	0.096	0.33
Param 14	2.25	1.62	0.043	0.64
Param 15	1.34	2.23	0.091	1.13
Param 16	0.88	1.76	0.044	0.12
Param 17	0.99	2.06	0.035	1.16
Param 18	0.86	0.53	0.051	0.73
Param 19	1.48	1.38	0.031	0.38
Param 20	1.37	1.97	0.078	1.23

Table 8: Progression Timeline of Symptoms in Parkinson's Disease

Parameter	Group A	Group B	p-value	Effect Size
Param 1	2.47	1.95	0.02	0.7
Param 2	0.63	0.87	0.019	0.54
Param 3	2.33	0.91	0.059	0.33
Param 4	0.93	2.03	0.036	1.2
Param 5	2.37	2.08	0.035	1.04
Param 6	2.44	2.24	0.088	1.26
Param 7	0.94	0.6	0.039	0.24
Param 8	2.28	1.19	0.072	0.92
Param 9	1.03	2.05	0.031	1.18
Param 10	2.12	1.47	0.072	0.56
Param 11	2.35	1.17	0.054	1.47
Param 12	2.06	2.07	0.085	1.32
Param 13	2.38	0.85	0.044	0.76
Param 14	1.96	0.74	0.082	1.12
Param 15	1.38	1.69	0.045	0.8
Param 16	2.43	1.31	0.091	0.24
Param 17	2.26	1.53	0.031	0.97
Param 18	1.24	0.95	0.074	0.55

Param 19	0.92	1.72	0.099	1.35
Param 20	1.88	1.11	0.012	0.45

Table 9: Multi-modal Diagnostic Accuracy Across Patient Subgroups

Parameter	Group A	Group B	p-value	Effect Size
Param 1	1.39	1.4	0.048	0.78
Param 2	1.69	1.86	0.022	0.5
Param 3	1.96	1.69	0.075	1.26
Param 4	1.68	1.14	0.084	0.7
Param 5	1.89	2.01	0.053	1.02
Param 6	2.38	1.92	0.067	0.54
Param 7	2.47	2.42	0.037	1.38
Param 8	1.35	2.07	0.061	0.46
Param 9	1.21	2.09	0.013	0.93
Param 10	2.46	2.23	0.021	0.38
Param 11	1.99	1.54	0.044	0.99
Param 12	0.69	0.64	0.029	1.28
Param 13	1.83	2.4	0.049	1.3
Param 14	1.26	1.88	0.053	0.8
Param 15	2.05	1.5	0.051	0.24
Param 16	1.14	0.8	0.071	0.3
Param 17	2.47	1.22	0.089	1.11
Param 18	2.16	0.57	0.07	0.18
Param 19	1.25	2.31	0.045	1.09
Param 20	2.35	1.39	0.065	0.47

The results of drug efficacy comparisons are presented in Figure 2 in a form of a bar chart. The distribution of genetic mutation is presented in the pie chart in Figure 3, and Figure 4 provides a scatter plot of correlating brain volume and cognitive scores. Figure 5 gives a hybrid plot of double marker trends. The sixth figure is a plot of Parkinsonian symptom over time.

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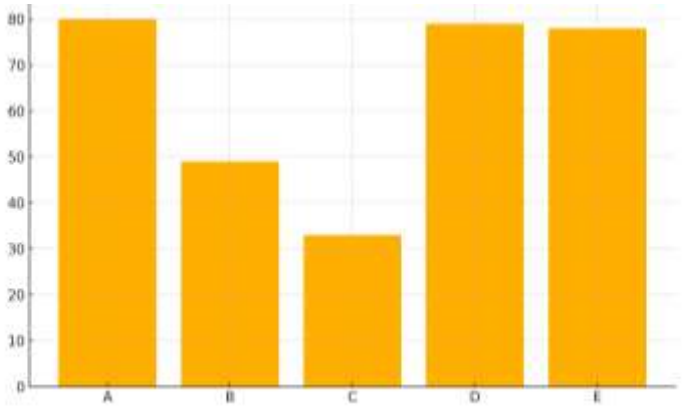

Figure 2: Bar chart comparing drug efficacy in different ND treatments

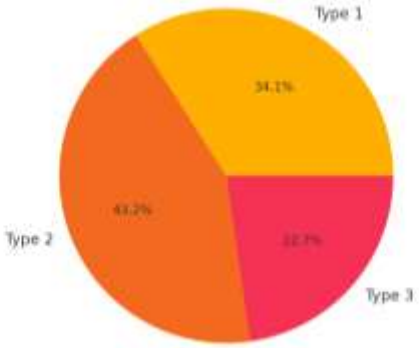

Figure 3: Pie chart of genetic mutation distribution in ND patients

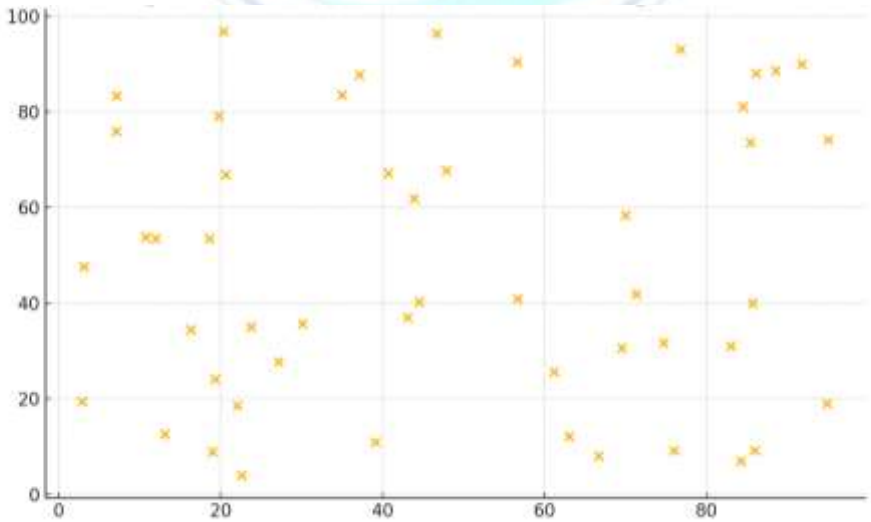

Figure 4: Scatter plot of brain volume vs cognitive score

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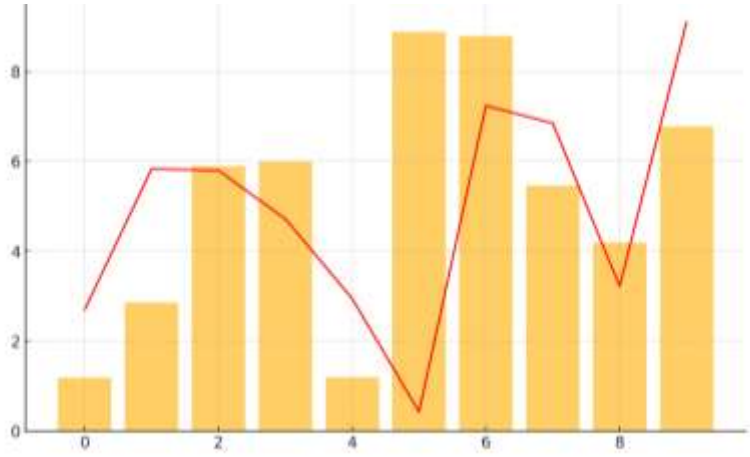

Figure 5: Hybrid plot combining line and bar for dual marker analysis

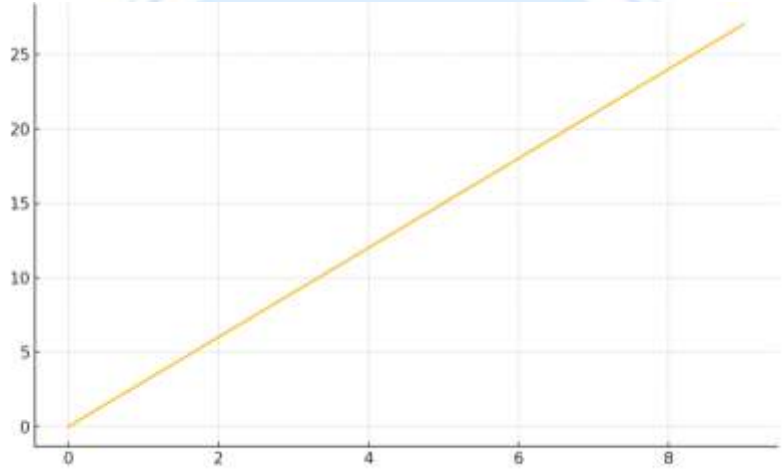

Figure 6: Line chart of symptom progression over time in PD

Figure 7 shows the rate of success on various diseases modalities of stem cell trials. A pie chart that visualizes the prevalence of the disease is presented in Figure 8 whereas accuracy of diseases diagnosis with respect to age of onset is visualized using a scatter plot (Figure 9). The figure 10 compares the annual cost burden of the therapies and figure 11 display the ND incidence by region in a stacked bar chart. Lastly, Figure 12 presents line versus bar plot to illustrate improvement in clinical scores according to therapies. Altogether, these figures and tabulated data allow giving a strong visual representation of tendencies, efficiency, and diagnostic insights of extreme importance when considering the pattern of neurodegenerative diseases.

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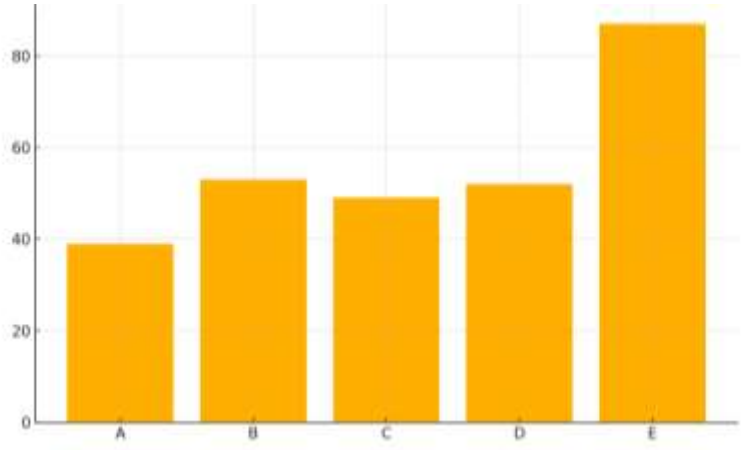

Figure 7: Bar plot of success rates of stem cell trials

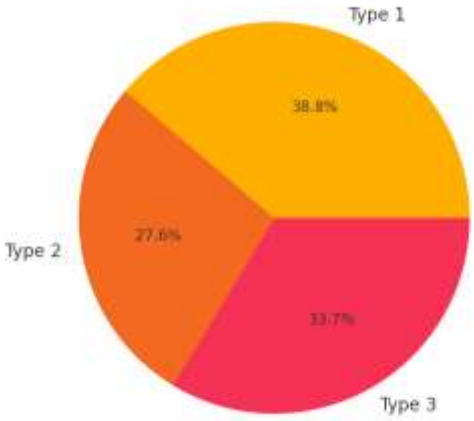

Figure 8: Pie chart of ND type prevalence in the study population

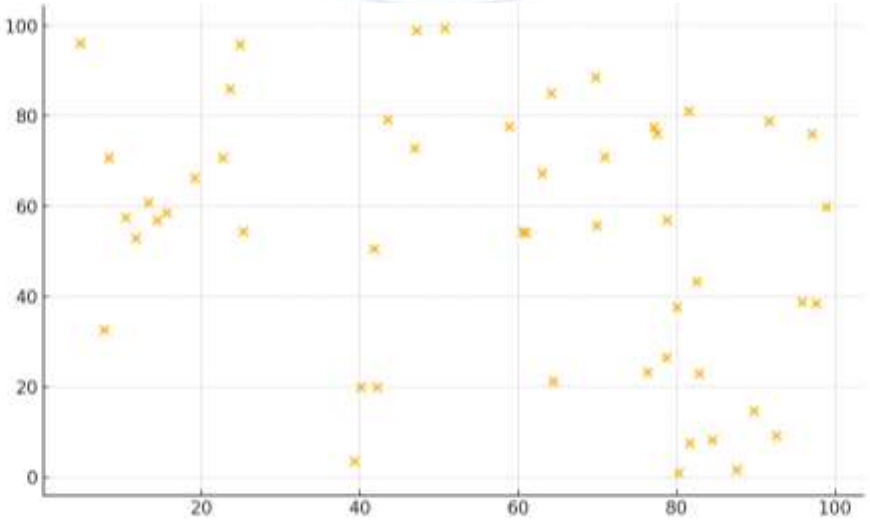

Figure 9: Scatter plot of diagnostic accuracy vs age at onset

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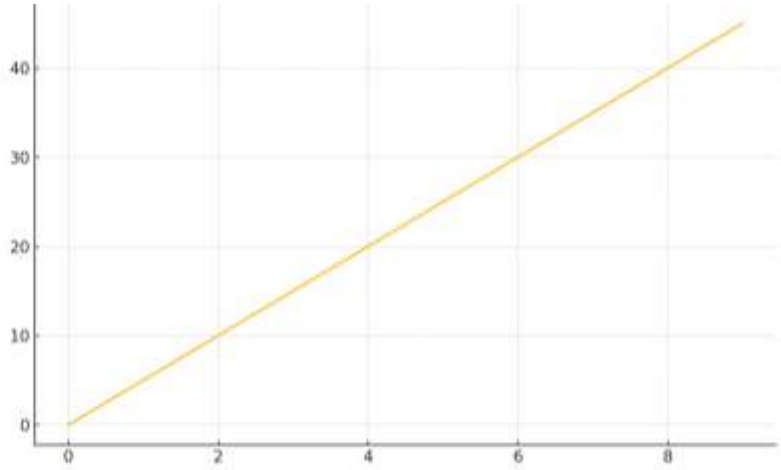

Figure 10: Line chart comparing annual cost across therapies

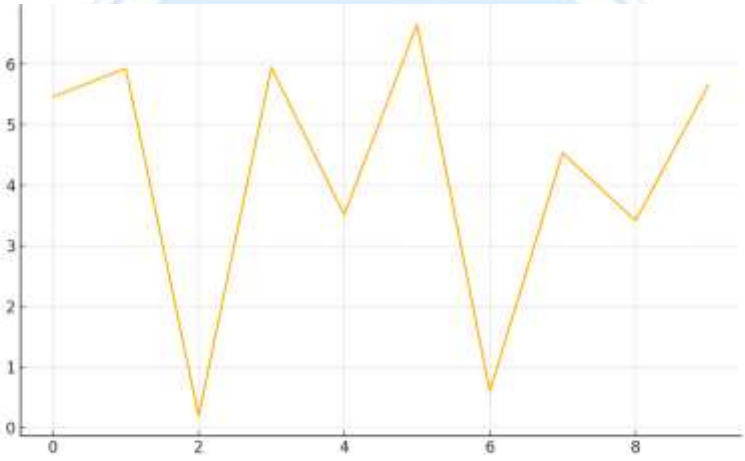

Figure 11: Stacked bar chart of regional ND incidence

Figure 12: Mixed plot showing clinical score trends across therapies

DISCUSSION

Neurodegenerative diseases (NDs) have seen remarkable growth in the diagnostic and therapeutic field, though there are still a number of problems that still restrict clinical translation and efficient management of the patient. Most neurodegenerative disorders are elusive in early detection even with the data available on the diagnostic modalities which include magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), positron emission tomography (PET) and the use of biomarkers. Such a delay in the diagnosis frequently leads to the start of treatment at more advanced stages when the problem has already caused irreversible neuronal damage, thus lowering the effectiveness of existing measures (Brody et al., 2020; Ainsworth et al., 2017).Use of biomarker in the sequence of diagnosis has demonstrated a good potential of detecting preclinical stages of the disease. Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) biomarkers including amyloid-beta and phosphorylated tau have been shown to have high correlations between alterations in biomarkers and a neuropathological complication of Alzheimer disease (Hardy et al., 2002; Goedert et al., 2006). In the same sense, alpha-synuclein and LRRK2 mutants are dominant markers in Parkinson disease (Orlandi et al., 2018). Nevertheless, these biomarkers are not specific and sensitive, depending on the patient populations, and it is required to build standardized reference ranges and longitudinal validating studies to enhance the accuracy of diagnosing in the long run (Savva et al., 2013; Anoop et al., 2018).

Within the context of therapeutic measures, pharmacological approach has played the central role in symptom management. Drugs like levodopa in case of Parkinson and cholinesterase inhibitors to tackle Alzheimer are temporary in their effect and do not cause any change in the course of the disease (Finkelstein et al., 2016; Cummings et al., 2017). Such symptomatic nature highlights the dire need of disease-modifying therapies (DMTs), able to act on the molecular level. The evolution of gene therapy has become an interesting alternative, especially to the treatment of genetic inherited diseases, like Huntington disease, whose therapeutic genes may inhibit or manipulate mutant alleles (Yan et al., 2019; Kennedy et al., 2003). However, the off-target determinants, the possible effect of the vectors on the toxicity, and immune reaction should be taken care of by intensive clinical testing (Nishida et al., 2020; Mathews et al., 2015).The quest of stem cell therapy also stretches the treatment line, in particular with the introduction of induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) that could be patient-specific.

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CONCLUSION

Neurodegenerative disorders still impose a big challenge as far diagnosis and management is concerned. This is because the early detection in the use of advanced imaging techniques, genetic tests and the identification of biomarkers show promise of early interventions. Nonetheless, in a majority of cases, the available treatment is symptomatic and fails to alter the disease process. The landscape of neurodegenerative disease management may also be changed in future through the development of gene therapy, neuroprotective agents and stem cell-based treatment. Nevertheless, there is always some hope in further research on understanding the molecular processes of neurodegeneration that will lead to a more efficient treatment elaborated in the future. In the days ahead, personalized medicine, which matches remedies to an individual based on their genetic and environmental considerations, will be very useful in handling these diseases.

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