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One in four memory clinic patients at risk of receiving wrong advice

Almost a quarter of people who attend memory clinics have a poorly understood brain condition that is at risk of being overlooked or even misdiagnosed, according to a new study.

Experts say these patients – who are likely to have a condition known as functional cognitive disorder – can often be dismissed, told incorrectly they are at high risk of dementia, or even given an inaccurate diagnosis of the disease.

Scientists hope the findings will encourage health professionals to better treat the disorder, which is typically linked to problems with memory and concentration. It can also sometimes be accompanied by depression, anxiety, pain, or fatigue

The condition is caused by changes in how the brain works, rather than by direct injury or a degenerative disease, such as Alzheimer's.

Failure to provide accurate treatment could harm people's long-term health, experts said. An incorrect diagnosis is likely to result in the wrong medical treatment and patients may make important decisions based on an inaccurate prediction about their future.

A team from the University of Edinburgh's Centre for Dementia Prevention studied almost 250 scientific papers on patients with memory problems.

They found around one in four attending memory clinics were likely to have functional cognitive disorder, rather than degenerative brain diseases.

Unlike the deteriorating memory and thinking problems caused by dementia, researchers found that, in functional cognitive disorder, memory and thinking problems can be highly variable, stay the same, or improve over time.

Experts believe there is a lack of understanding across the medical profession around these disorders.

Researchers are now undertaking a clinical study in patients with memory symptoms, which aims to improve the diagnosis of functional cognitive disorders.

The research was funded by Baillie Gifford. It is published in medical journal *Lancet Psychiatry*.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Dr Laura McWhirter, from the University of Edinburgh, said: “People with functional cognitive disorders suffer greatly from their memory problems but often don’t get the right advice or treatment. This study shows us that functional cognitive disorder is common in memory clinics. I hope it will be the starting point for long-overdue research into better ways of diagnosing and treating patients with these conditions.”

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