

Interview

Today we are talking with Dr. Ali A. Asadi-Pooya, first author of Driving a motor vehicle and psychogenic nonepileptic seizures: ILAE Report by the Task Force on Psychogenic Nonepileptic Seizures. This study was published in September 2020 by Epilepsia Open, the open-access journal of the International League Against Epilepsy.

Tell us a bit more about yourself: Where are you from? Where do you work?

I am Ali A. Asadi-Pooya, M.D., a Professor of Epileptology, at the Department of Neurology, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran. I am also an Adjunct Research Associate Professor of Neurology, Jefferson Comprehensive Epilepsy Center, Department of Neurology, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA, USA. I did my fellowship in “epilepsy and clinical neurophysiology” at Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, USA in 2006-2008. I did a second epilepsy fellowship on “Invasive intracranial EEG monitoring” in 2014-2016.

I have established an Epilepsy Care Unit and epilepsy surgery program with a multidisciplinary team in 2008 at Namazee Hospital, Shiraz, Iran. I have also founded the Shiraz Epilepsy Research Center in 2020. I have published more than 275 papers and 13 books about various aspects of epilepsy. The main foci of my research program are: 1. Epilepsy surgery: prognostic factors and outcome; 2. Functional Seizures (Psychogenic nonepileptic seizures): epidemiology, semiology and clinical characteristics, etiology, and treatment; 3. Idiopathic generalized epilepsies.

What does an average week look like for you at home and work?

I manage 7-9 patients per day at the epilepsy monitoring unit at Namazi Hospital, Saturday through Wednesday. I spend Thursdays (full day) and other days (in the afternoon) doing research. Friday is a family day.

How did you get interested in Functional Neurological Disorders?

After doing my fellowship and starting my practice, I realized that many of these patients are basically like homeless people (no one accepts the responsibility to take care of them). Therefore, I felt that was my responsibility to do something to help them. And now, it has been 14 years since my involvement in this field.

This is a very important article and makes a significant contribution to our understanding of an important topic. Can you tell us how you and your team came together and how you collaborated in writing it?

On July 11, 2019, we emailed a questionnaire to 50 international experts in this field. The survey included 10 questions: one question about professional qualifications, three questions on the participants’ personal experience with the issue of interest [driving in patients with functional (psychogenic) seizures], five

questions probing their opinions about the matter of interest, and a final question about the respondent's interest in participation in the refinement process of the driving decision-making guidance. The main authors collected and analyzed the responses and developed a first draft of a summary. A "majority opinion" was defined as one endorsed by more than 50% of the respondents.

In your experience, what are the common challenges health professionals face when they have to consider driving restrictions in people with functional seizures?

A common problem includes not having specific rules and regulations for such patients.

Many of us struggle with assessing and advising patients who are suspected to have epileptic seizures and functional seizures. Do you have any advice for that and are there any other pearls of wisdom for the clinical practice you can share with health professionals who have to decide driving restrictions in people with functional seizures?

I strongly suggest considering video-EEG monitoring where it is available. If it is not available, encourage the caregivers to record the events on their smartphone, so you can see the event yourself.

If someone is interested in learning more about the diagnosis and management of driving and functional seizures - apart from reading your article - what would you recommend.

I suggest reading that article (☺). It is a comprehensive article on this issue.