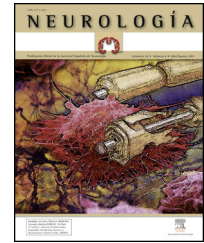




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REVIEW ARTICLE

Diagnosis of vascular cognitive impairment and its main categories[☆]

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KEYWORDS

Vascular cognitive impairment;
Vascular dementia;
Post-stroke dementia;
Mild cognitive impairment;
Stroke;
Cerebrovascular diseases

Abstract

Objective: A review of current criteria for the diagnosis of categories related with vascular cognitive impairment, in particular the nomenclature, diagnostic criteria, and differential clinical–radiological findings.

Development: The criteria for the diagnosis of vascular cognitive impairment have evolved, but available criteria were designed basically for differentiating between vascular dementia and dementia due to Alzheimer disease, and for research purposes. Nevertheless, in clinical practice precise elements are required for: (1) Clinical diagnosis of dementia and mild cognitive impairment; (2) Clinical and neuroimaging criteria for identification of the various cerebrovascular lesions associated with cognitive dysfunction, and (3) A formulation of the aetiological–pathogenic relationship between cognitive impairment and cerebrovascular lesions. For this reason, a review was carried out on the diagnostic elements of vascular cognitive impairment categories, classification, and their most relevant characteristics. It highlights the characteristic for the diagnosis of multi-infarction dementia, strategic single infarct dementia, small vessel disease with dementia, mixed dementia, and vascular mild cognitive impairment.

Conclusions: Standardisation is required, by a multidisciplinary expert team, as regards nomenclature and criteria for the diagnosis of the full spectrum associated with vascular cognitive impairment and especially for vascular dementia and its categories.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Deterioro cognitivo vascular;
Demencia vascular;
Demencia post-ictus;

Diagnóstico del deterioro cognitivo vascular y sus principales categorías

Resumen

Objetivo: Revisar los principios actuales para el diagnóstico de las categorías de deterioro cognitivo vascular, con énfasis en la nomenclatura, los criterios diagnósticos y los hallazgos clínico-radiológicos diferenciales.

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Deterioro cognitivo leve;
Ictus;
Enfermedades cerebrovasculares

Desarrollo: Los principios para el diagnóstico del deterioro cognitivo vascular han evolucionado, pero los criterios disponibles fueron diseñados básicamente para diferenciar la demencia vascular de la demencia tipo Alzheimer, y para propósitos de investigación. Sin embargo, en la práctica clínica se requieren elementos precisos para: 1) el diagnóstico clínico de la demencia y el deterioro cognitivo leve, 2) la identificación clínica y por neuroimagen de las diversas lesiones cerebrovasculares asociadas con la disfunción cognitiva, y 3) la formulación de una relación etiopatogénica entre el deterioro cognitivo y las lesiones cerebrovasculares. Por esta razón se revisaron los elementos diagnósticos de las categorías de deterioro cognitivo vascular, su clasificación y características más relevantes. Se enfatizó en las características que permiten el diagnóstico de la demencia multi-infarto, la demencia por infarto estratégico, la demencia por enfermedad de pequeño vaso cerebral, la demencia mixta y el deterioro cognitivo leve vascular.

Conclusiones: Se requiere de la estandarización, por un grupo multidisciplinario de expertos, de la nomenclatura y criterios para el diagnóstico del espectro completo del deterioro cognitivo vascular, y especialmente para la demencia vascular y sus categorías.

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Introduction

Vascular cognitive impairment (VCI) is a broad term that includes dementia and mild cognitive impairment (MCI) associated with or caused by cerebrovascular lesion (Fig. 1). Both entities are of great interest to clinicians and researchers because they refer to a problem that is both common and potentially preventable.¹⁻⁷

This review provides an update of diagnostic principles for the different categories of VCI, with emphasis on their nomenclature, diagnostic criteria for each category, and their distinguishing clinical and radiological findings. Articles were mainly identified using PubMed searches for the following terms: 'vascular cognitive impairment', 'vascular dementia', 'post-stroke dementia', and 'mild cognitive impairment'. We selected original research and reviews from the last 5 years that specifically assess the entities listed above. We also included references from the authors' collections.

Diagnosing the dementia syndrome

Diagnosis for a dementia syndrome is performed on a purely clinical basis, drawing specifically from the medical history and the neurocognitive examination.⁸⁻¹⁰ Defining the cognitive-behavioural syndrome that will identify the generic type of dementia, and particularly its vascular subtype, is crucial for assigning the diagnosis. The classic Hachinski Ischaemic Score and the Rosen modification do not include a definition of the cognitive syndrome.¹¹ The criteria developed later to define cognitive syndromes are based on one of the following essential findings: (1) memory decline, (2) patchy cognitive deficits, (3) executive dysfunction, and (4) multifaceted cognitive impairment.

Declining memory is an essential or required feature in the definition of the cognitive syndrome of vascular dementia, according to the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke and the Association Internationale pour la Recherche

et l'Enseignement en Neurosciences (NINDS-AIREN). Memory loss is also necessary for a diagnosis of the typical symptomatic form of Alzheimer disease (AD).^{12,13} However, identifying memory loss as the essential feature can impede proper identification of other patterns in vascular cognitive impairment. Marked memory loss is often not the most important sign of cognitive impairment associated with cerebrovascular disease, and it may not be the initial symptom of vascular dementia.^{3,11,14} A substantial portion of the cases with vascular dementia display severe deficits

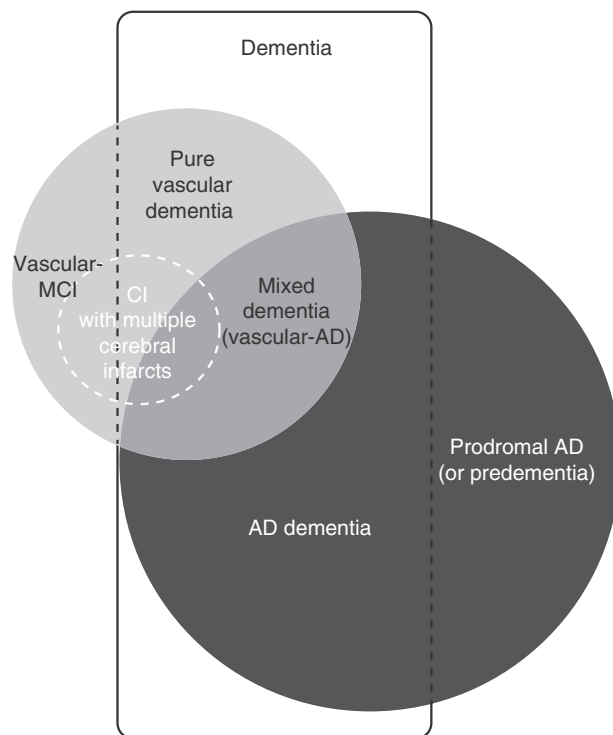


Figure 1 Diagram showing the links between the main entities associated with vascular cognitive impairment and Alzheimer disease. CI: cognitive impairment; MCI: mild cognitive impairment; AD: Alzheimer disease.

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