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Cortically evoked potentials in the human subthalamic nucleus

Daphne G.M. Zwartjes[a,*,1], Marcus L.F. Janssen[b,c,f,1], Tjitske Heida[a], Vivianne Van Kranen-Mastenbroek[d], Lo J. Bour[g], Yasin Temel[b,e,f], Veerle Visser-Vandewalle[h], Peter H. Veltink[a]

[a] MIRA institute for Biomedical Engineering and Technical Medicine, Biomedical Signals and Systems group, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands
[b] Department of Neuroscience, Maastricht University Medical Center, Maastricht, The Netherlands
[c] Department of Neurology, Maastricht University Medical Center, Maastricht, The Netherlands
[d] Department of Neurophysiology, Maastricht University Medical Center, Maastricht, The Netherlands
[e] Department of Neurosurgery, Maastricht University Medical Center, Maastricht, The Netherlands
[f] European Graduate School of Neuroscience (EURON)
[g] Department of Neurology/Clinical Neurophysiology, Academic Medical Center, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
[h] Department of Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery, University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany

HIGHLIGHTS

- We hypothesize that DBS in the STN motor area gives the optimal effect for PD.
- We perform motor cortex stimulation and measure the evoked potentials in the STN.
- We hypothesize that the cortically evoked potentials can identify the STN motor area.
- Cortically evoked potentials follow a specific spatial and temporal pattern in the STN.
- The evoked subthalamic potentials are partly related to the unit responses.

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ABSTRACT

Deep brain stimulation (DBS) of the subthalamic nucleus (STN) alleviates motor symptoms in Parkinson's disease (PD) patients. However, in a substantial number of patients the beneficial effects of STN DBS are overshadowed by psychiatric side effects. We hypothesize that stimulation of the STN motor area will provide the optimal effect on the motor symptoms without inducing these side effects, and expect that motor cortex stimulation (MCS) evokes a spatially specific response within the STN, which identifies the STN motor area. We previously showed that MCS evokes responses in the unit activity specifically within certain areas of the STN. Unit activity is generally considered a measure of the output activity. To gain more insight into the neuronal input into the STN, we describe the results of cortically evoked subthalamic local field potentials (LFPs). We show that the cortically evoked LFPs follow a certain temporal and spatial pattern. The significant peaks of the evoked LFPs coincide with the timing of some of the inhibitions and excitations present in the unit responses. The spatial resolution of responses measured in the LFP to MCS is not high enough to identify the STN motor region. However, we believe that optimizing targeting techniques and the development of novel DBS electrodes will improve STN DBS therapy for PD patients.

1. Introduction

Neuronal recordings from the human subthalamic nucleus (STN) have become possible due to the surgical treatment for advanced Parkinson's disease (PD), such as deep brain stimulation (DBS) of the STN. STN DBS provides a remarkable improvement in the motor function of PD patients [6]. Unfortunately, STN DBS also induces unwanted behavioral changes, such as emotional disturbances and cognitive alterations [23]. These unwanted side-effects can be explained by the involvement of the STN in motor, associative and limbic behavior. Current spread to the associative area,

* Corresponding author at: Twente University, Institute for Biomedical Engineering and Technical Medicine (MIRA), Biomedical Signals and Systems Group, Drienerlolaan 5, Zuidhorst 210 (Box 217), 7500 AE, Enschede, The Netherlands. Tel.:+31 53 489 27 57.
E-mail address: d.g.m.zwartjes@utwente.nl (D.G.M. Zwartjes).
[1] Both authors contributed equally to this manuscript.

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which is located ventrolaterally, and to the limbic area in the most ventromedial tip of the nucleus is responsible for the psychiatric side effects [7,20,22]. Therefore, electrophysiological unit recordings are utilized to identify the STN and optimize electrode placement. Also local field potentials (LFPs) are often measured from the implanted DBS electrodes. The LFP shows pathologic ß oscillatory activity (12–30 Hz) in the STN of PD patients. This pathologic increase in ß activity is mainly observed within the dorsolateral motor region of the STN [13,19,24]. The LFP represents the summed postsynaptic potentials of a group of neurons [5], therefore it can be considered as the input activity. In contrast, the unit activity is a measure of the output activity. In human, the cortex is classically connected to the STN via the indirect pathway, which not only passes through the striatum and globus pallidus externa to the STN [20], but also via a monosynaptic pathway [4]. Previously, we have shown in human that motor cortex stimulation (MCS) evoked responses in the unit activity, which were not present outside the STN and differed spatially within the STN [11]. Strafella et al. [21] had similar findings when measuring subthalamic unit activity during transcranial magnetic stimulation. Considering the different neuronal origin of the LFP, a more detailed study of the response in the LFP to MCS will provide more insight into the subthalamic input activity and the pathways involved [16]. We hypothesized that the LFP is specifically responsive to MCS in the dorsolateral region of the STN, as this is the area believed to be involved in motor function [7]. Therefore, in this study we present the cortically evoked potentials in the LFP signal in the subthalamic region. As the LFP is believed to represent the neural input activity, it could provide an interesting tool for locating the STN motor area during stereotactic surgery. This potential use was studied by determining the temporal and spatial extent of the evoked LFPs. These results were also compared to the unit responses, which show a specific response to cortical stimulation in the dorsal STN [11].

2. Methods

Patients were enrolled based on the same criteria used for standard STN DBS. Five patients (ages 52–70 years) were included, but only the procedure and results of the last patient are described. The stimulation protocols used in the other patients did not result in an STN response due to saturation of the amplifier in the first two patients and suboptimal MCS protocols in the remaining two patients. The study, including five patients, was approved by the Medical Ethical Committee of the Maastricht University Medical Centre and all the patients gave written informed consent.

The procedure has been previously described in detail by Janssen et al. [11]. In short, subdural MCS with a strip of four electrodes (Model TS04R-SP10X-000; ADTech, Racine, WI, USA) was performed on the hand area of the motor cortex (stimulation settings: bipolar, monophasic, 0.2 ms, 7 or 15 mA, 200 stimuli). Concurrently, neuronal activity in and around the STN was measured using five microelectrodes (MicroMacroElectrode; InoMed, Emmendingen, Germany). Only local anesthesia was used. The stimulation amplitudes were determined based on the amplitude needed to obtain a motor evoked potential (MEP, 7 mA).

In order to obtain LFPs from the raw signals, the signals were filtered using a non-causal second order band pass Butterworth filter between 3 and 95 Hz; 50 Hz noise was removed using a notch filter. Subsequently, the signals were divided into epochs from 100 ms before stimulation until 200 ms after stimulation. All epochs belonging to the same location and resulting from the same stimulation settings were averaged. Significant deflections in the average LFPs were determined when five successive samples exceeded a threshold of plus or minus two times the standard deviation of the signal measured during 15 mA stimulation. LFP responses were compared to the responses in the unit activity. The unit responses were evaluated by peri-stimulus time histograms (PSTHs) in which significant changes were found by the change point analysis. A detailed description of the analysis of the unit activity is previously described [11].

3. Results

LFP recordings in the anterior and lateral trajectories were made from 1.5 and 0.5 mm above the target until 1 and 2.5 mm below the target. These trajectories were inside the STN from 2 mm above the target until 2.5 mm below the target. Fig. 1 shows the LFPs and peri-stimulus time histograms (PSTHs) constructed using the responses in the unit activity [11] after cortical stimulation. The LFPs show a positive deflection around 43 ± 3 ms. This peak is present at all heights in the lateral trajectory and at -1.5 and -0.5 mm in the anterior trajectory. Subsequently, negative peaks are present at 78 ms in the anterior trajectory and at 81 ms in the lateral trajectory at a height of -1.5 mm. At -0.5 mm above the calculated target, this negative peak has disappeared. At +1 mm in the anterior and lateral trajectory and at +2.5 mm in the lateral trajectory, a positive peak is seen at ~75 ms after stimulation. Finally, a significant negative peak is visible in the anterior trajectory at +2.5 mm. In the central and medial trajectory, the LFP response did show some significant peaks, but no specific pattern was visible. The LFP results did not correspond with the changes in the PSTH, which showed little to no response to stimulation [11].

Responses were only visible in the LFPs when 15 mA stimulation was applied, but not when a stimulus amplitude of 7 mA was used; except for the responses shown at +2.5 mm. This was in agreement with the fact that no significant responses to MCS were visible in the PSTHs while using an amplitude of 7 mA for MCS [11].

The positive peak at 43 ms corresponds with the start of the first inhibitory period found in the PSTHs at heights -1.5 and -0.5 mm. The negative peaks at 78 and 81 ms at a height of -1.5 mm in the anterior and lateral trajectory are within the period of increased firing rate in the PSTHs from about 63–100 ms after stimulation. The positive peaks in the anterior and lateral trajectories at ~75 ms are not seen in the PSTHs at these levels.

4. Discussion

In this study, for the first time evoked LFPs in the STN region following MCS in a PD patient have been described. We showed that evoked LFPs follow a specific pattern in the dorsal STN, namely first a positive deflection around 43 ms followed by a negative deflection around 80 ms. The positive deflection is seen in the entire STN, but the negative deflection seems specific to the dorsolateral STN region. Some of the evoked LFP peaks are temporally and spatially linked to the unit responses to MCS.

We showed that the cortical input to the human STN can be visualized in the LFP. However, the temporal response in the LFP is not as clear-cut as in the rodent, although the LFP was averaged over many stimuli, which was not necessary in rodents [16]. In contrast to the animal data, the deflections in the LFP caused by the mono-synaptic cortico-subthalamic pathway and the indirect cortico-striato-pallido-subthalamic pathway were not found. This could be due to difference in the size of the dendritic fields between species and a prominent lower cell density in the human compared to the rodent STN [8,17]. Nonetheless, a clear positive deflection around 43 ms and a negative deflection around 80 ms were observed. The positive deflection was seen through the full ventro-dorsal axis of the STN and has a similar latency as observed in the rodents, which is the start of the long-lasting inhibitory period that may be caused by cortical disfacilitation [16]. The