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Validation of an algorithm-based definition of treatment resistance in patients with schizophrenia

Olesya Ajnakina [a,*], Henriette Thisted Horsdal [b,c], John Lally [a,d,e], James H. MacCabe [a,f], Robin M. Murray [a,f], Christiane Gasse [b,c], Theresa Wimberley [b,c]

[a] Department of Psychosis Studies, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, King's College London, UK
[b] National Centre for Register-based Research, Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark
[c] iPSYCH; the Lundbeck Foundation Initiative for Integrative Psychiatric Research, Denmark
[d] Department of Psychiatry, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Beaumont Hospital, Dublin, Ireland
[e] Department of Psychiatry, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences, University College Dublin, St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, Ireland
[f] National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Mental Health Biomedical Research Centre at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust and King's College London, UK

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ABSTRACT

Large-scale pharmacoepidemiological research on treatment resistance relies on accurate identification of people with treatment-resistant schizophrenia (TRS) based on data that are retrievable from administrative registers. This is usually approached by operationalising clinical treatment guidelines by using prescription and hospital admission information. We examined the accuracy of an algorithm-based definition of TRS based on clozapine prescription and/or meeting algorithm-based eligibility criteria for clozapine against a gold standard definition using case notes. We additionally validated a definition entirely based on clozapine prescription. 139 schizophrenia patients aged 18–65 years were followed for a mean of 5 years after first presentation to psychiatric services in South-London, UK. The diagnostic accuracy of the algorithm-based measure against the gold standard was measured with sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV) and negative predictive value (NPV). A total of 45 (32.4%) schizophrenia patients met the criteria for the gold standard definition of TRS; applying the algorithm-based definition to the same cohort led to 44 (31.7%) patients fulfilling criteria for TRS with sensitivity, specificity, PPV and NPV of 62.2%, 83.0%, 63.6% and 82.1%, respectively. The definition based on lifetime clozapine prescription had sensitivity, specificity, PPV and NPV of 40.0%, 94.7%, 78.3% and 76.7%, respectively. Although a perfect definition of TRS cannot be derived from available prescription and hospital registers, these results indicate that researchers can confidently use registries to identify individuals with TRS for research and clinical practices.

1. Introduction

Treatment-resistant schizophrenia (TRS) is a major cause of disability and functional impairment worldwide (Kennedy et al., 2014). Approximately 30% of patients with schizophrenia will develop TRS at some point during their illness course (Elkis and Buckley, 2016; Kane et al., 1988) with all standard treatment guidelines recommending these patients be treated with clozapine (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2009; National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guideline, 2014). The gold standard definition of TRS is defined as insufficient response to at least two sequential, different antipsychotic medications of adequate doses taken over an adequate time period (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guideline, 2014); though the definition of insufficient response is open to interpretation (Howes et al., 2016).

When using register-based data, response, or lack thereof, to antipsychotics often has to be inferred from data on service use or changes in prescriptions. This has led researchers to design proxy measures of TRS (Huber et al., 2008). Some of the authors (J.M., C.G., H.T.H. and T.W.), using register data on prescriptions and psychiatric admissions, developed a definition of insufficient response, which is based on the clinical guidelines and recommendations, using the data available in the Danish prescription and hospital registers. While this definition of TRS has already yielded a wealth of insights into treatment-resistant schizophrenia (Wimberley et al., 2016a; Wimberley et al., 2016b; Wimberley et al., 2017a; Wimberley et al., 2017b; Horsdal et al., 2017), its validity against the gold standard definition has not been established.

Therefore, we aimed to validate the algorithm-based definition of TRS (Wimberley et al., 2016b) compared to the gold standard definition

* Corresponding author at: Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London, 16 De Crespigny Park, London SE5 8AF, UK.
E-mail address: olesya.ajnakina@kcl.ac.uk (O. Ajnakina).

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of TRS using the longitudinal data from a well-characterised sample of patients with first-episode schizophrenia (FES) collected in South-London and who were assessed after first five years of illness (Ajnakina et al., 2017; Lally et al., 2016). Another more simple definition of TRS is based exclusively on lifetime clozapine prescription, and has been used in a number of studies (Manuel et al., 2012; Wheeler et al., 2014; Wimberley et al., 2016a, 2016b; Horsdal et al., 2017). We additionally validated this clozapine definition, which we expect would have close to 100% in positive predictive value for detecting TRS patients.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

Participants were recruited as part of the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) Genetics and Psychosis (GAP) study conducted in South-London, UK between December 2005 and October 2010. Further details of the sample are available in Supplementary material and Di Forti et al., 2014. Among 283 first-episode schizophrenia spectrum psychosis patients (International Classification of Diseases (ICD)-10 diagnoses: F20.0, F25.0, F28.0, F29.0) (WHO, 1992), 166 were FES patients (ICD-10 diagnoses: F20.0) who formed our core analytic sample. Ethical permission was obtained from the South-London and Maudsley Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) and the Institute of Psychiatry Research Ethics Committee. All patients gave informed written consent after reading a detailed information sheet.

2.2. Tracing patients and data at follow-up

The detailed approach to follow-up is provided in Supplementary material and elsewhere (Ajnakina et al., 2017; Lally et al., 2016). As depicted in Fig. 1, we successfully followed-up 139 (83.7%) of the original FES cohort for a mean of 5 years after first presentation to psychiatric services and who had received adequate trials of antipsychotic medications during the follow-up period to ascertain their treatment resistant status. Because these data additionally included information on patients with first episode of schizophrenia spectrum disorder, we repeated the analyses on the extended cohort of 240 patients. Information at follow-up was collated from the electronic psychiatric records that are the primary clinical record-keeping system within the SLaM Trust (Stewart et al., 2009) using the WHO Life Chart Schedule (LCS) extended version (World Health Organization, 1994; Morgan et al., 2014; Susser et al., 2000). We used this measure at the end of the follow-up period to obtain standardised retrospective assessments of patients' experiences, clinical and social outcomes that were reported by treating clinicians for the entire period of illness. The illness period was operationalised as the period from first contact with mental health services to the date of the last assessment recorded in electronic notes. The LCS measure has been widely used in prospective and retrospective studies (Ajnakina et al., 2017; Schoeler et al., 2017).

Using the LCS extended version we collected detailed information on in-/out-patient medication history including the number of antipsychotic medications used prior to commencing clozapine, medication initiation/discontinuation dates, antipsychotic dose, and the reasons for changing or discontinuing each antipsychotic medication such as lack of therapeutic effects, intolerance of antipsychotic medications or self-discontinuation of each medication (Lally et al., 2016). We extracted detailed information on reasons for each re-admission throughout the entire follow-up period, and corresponding admission and discharge dates.

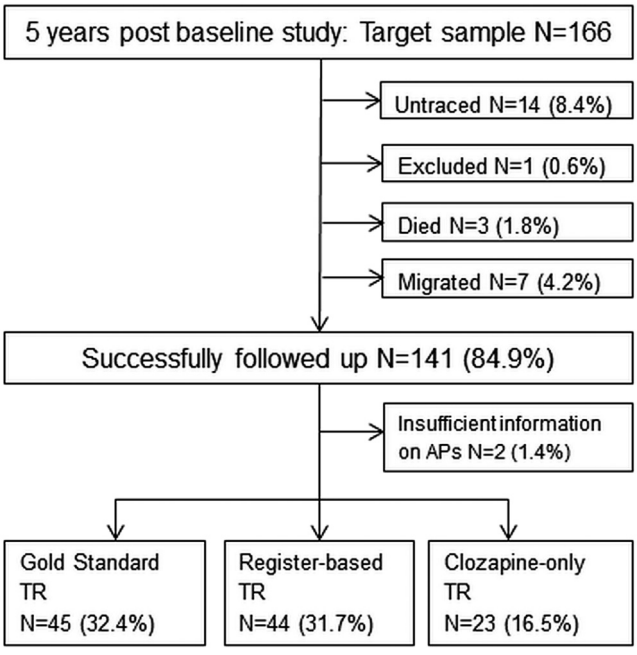

Fig. 1. Flow chart documenting how patients with first episode schizophrenia were traced five years after first contact with mental health services and administrative outcomes. APs, antipsychotic medications.

2.2.1. Gold standard definition of TRS

Following the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guideline (NICE guideline, 2014), patients were defined as having TRS if during the follow-up period they showed little or no symptomatic improvement to at least two consecutive treatments with antipsychotic medications of adequate dose and duration (≥6 weeks). A non-response to antipsychotic treatment was defined if 1) patients, having been treated with an antipsychotic medication of adequate dose and for an adequate duration did not show improvements in their clinical presentation as recorded by treating clinicians, and/or 2) the documented reason for switching antipsychotic medication was due to a lack of therapeutic response. An adequate dose of antipsychotic medication was defined according to a daily dose of ≥400 mg chlorpromazine equivalence (Leucht et al., 2014). We only included as TRS cases those patients who failed to respond and not those who were intolerant of antipsychotic medications or those who self-discontinued antipsychotic medication.

2.2.2. Algorithm-based definition of TRS

The algorithm-based definition of TRS was defined as treatment with clozapine in outpatient services and/or meeting the eligibility criterion for clozapine. The eligibility criterion entailed psychiatric hospital admission due to schizophrenia during antipsychotic treatment (as a proxy for insufficient treatment response) within 18 months after having had two outpatient consecutive periods of different treatments with antipsychotic medication for at ≥6 weeks' duration (Wimberley et al., 2016a, 2016b). We used outpatient lifetime clozapine prescription to define TRS.

2.3. Analyses

The predictive validity of the algorithm-based definition of TRS in determining treatment-resistant cases was evaluated with sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive values (PPV) and negative predictive values (NPV) (Parikh et al., 2008). All analyses were conducted in RStudio version 3.31 (Integrated Development for R. RStudio, Inc., Boston, MA).

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