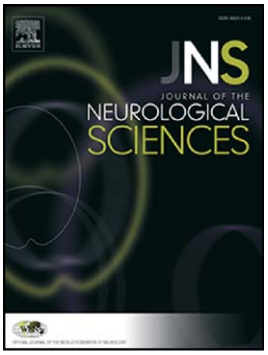

Neurologists and Zika

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PII: S0022-510X(16)00013-7
DOI: doi: 10.1016/j.jns.2016.02.045
Reference: JNS 14399

To appear in: *Journal of the Neurological Sciences*

Please cite this article as: Raad Shakir, Neurologists and Zika, *Journal of the Neurological Sciences* (2016), doi: 10.1016/j.jns.2016.02.045

Neurologists and Zika

The world is facing another viral epidemic, which is causing major concerns. Zika Flavi virus is transmitted by Aedes mosquitos and is now prevalent in the northern regions of South America and Central America. The WHO on the 1st February 2016 has declared Zika as Public Health Emergency of International Concern PHEIC[1] .The illness itself is mild and by and large does not need major medical intervention. However, the neurological consequences are devastating. This was the reason why the WHO has acted expeditiously[2]. Microcephaly, which has already affected thousands of babies is a major burden and will lead to life long major disability. Now that a post mortem case following termination of such an affected fetus has demonstrated Zika virus material in the brain[3] we are probably clearer on the association. Long-term disabilities with convulsions associated with severe psychomotor retardation are the expected consequences. These children will need lifelong neurological care.

The other issue, which has been reported in many countries, is the noticeably increased number of those affected by Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS). In a way, it is expected that this will happen following a viral illness although the association with a related flavi viruses such as Dengue is not conclusive. We do not know the type or severity of the GBS, but we know that in the absence of supportive treatment the mortality will be more than the generally expected 5% of affected individuals. So far we do not know the real number of those affected. If we presume that the preceding infection with Zika is similar to C. jejuni where 1:1000-5000 maybe affected[4] we are going to be faced by tens of thousands of cases. Moreover, we do not know if some of those infected by Zika without showing symptoms (80%), can go on to develop GBS. We also do not know if antecedent Zika infection will produce different clinical manifestations of GBS similar to the different varieties seen following triggers such as C jejuni, CMV, EBV or others?

It is conceivable that other neurological deficits can result form Zika infection. As the virus is isolated from brain and spinal cord of an unborn fetus[3] it may prove able invade directly other parts of the nervous system in an immediate or latent manner. Neurologists have to be vigilant in affected areas[5].