

FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN NEUROSCIENCE SOCIETIES

10th FENS Forum of Neuroscience

2-6 July 2016 – Copenhagen, Denmark

<http://forum2016.fens.org/>

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY 4 JULY 2016, 13.00 CEST / 12.00 BST

**PEOPLE WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA ARE MORE PRONE
TO SEVERE INFECTIONS**

A Danish study is currently investigating the link between schizophrenia and the development of infections like blood poisoning and pneumonia. The aim is to be able to help mentally ill patients lead a life with less physical discomfort.

Young adults diagnosed with schizophrenia face severe infections more often than the general population. Every third person affected by this serious mental disorder is also struggling with severe conditions such as infections in respiratory tract, blood poisoning, skin disorders or hepatitis.

These findings are the some of the first results of a Danish nationwide register study. The study is part of a PhD project lead by psychiatrist, **Monika Pankiewicz-Dulacz**, at the Psychiatric Unit Aabenraa in Denmark.

The new data was presented today (July 4) at the largest neuroscience meeting in Europe, FENS Forum held in Copenhagen.

By combining three registers, Ms Pankiewicz-Dulacz has been able to collect information on all Danes born between 1975 and 1990. In this population group, one in every 100, corresponding to 9000 persons, is suffering from schizophrenia. From 1995 to 2013, 32 percent, or approximately one-third of them has had contact with a hospital or an outpatient clinic due to a severe infection.

"This is a very high figure and it is significantly higher than for the general population. In addition to investigating the prevalence, we are interested in identifying what triggers the frequent infections and why people with schizophrenia are affected more severely," she said.

Ms Pankiewicz-Dulacz explains that people with schizophrenia have a range of risk factors for developing infections.

"They often have an unhealthy lifestyle which makes them more susceptible to physical diseases and infections. They have a higher incidence of diabetes, they are often drug addicts and they often smoke more and are physically inactive. The poor quality of life has a negative influence on the immune system and this can lead to infections," she said.

Genetic studies have demonstrated that the immune system is affected in people with schizophrenia. In the different phases of schizophrenia a change in the level of white blood cells and of so-called cytokines in the blood have been measured, both essential for the ability of the cells to fight infections.

It is estimated that 1 in 100 people develops schizophrenia. In most people the disease occurs at the ages 18-25. The cause is due to an interaction between genetic and environmental factors and it is one of the most serious mental illnesses. Life expectancy for schizophrenics is 15-20 years shorter than for healthy people. In Denmark, 40,000 people suffer from schizophrenia.

Using the study, Ms Pankiewicz-Dulacz hopes to develop better guideline for the treatment of patients.

"To a large extent, the infections can be prevented but the consequences of untreated infections can be serious. Ultimately, it is about helping these patients to fewer physical problems and thereby a better, and perhaps longer life," she said.

END

Abstract Reference: 2132 – C16a

Poster: *Infections in young adults with schizophrenia: prevalence, risk-factors and impact on outcome*

Contact

Metha Loumann, methamedia, Copenhagen, Denmark (*Danish language*)

tel: +45 60 82 04 03

email: ml@methamedia.dk

FENS Press Office and all media enquiries:

Elaine Snell, Snell Communications Ltd, London UK (*English language*)

tel: +44 (0)20 7738 0424 (*before 1 July and after 10 July*); or mobile +44 (0)7973 953 794

email: Elaine@snell-communications.net

NOTES TO EDITORS

The 10th FENS Forum of Neuroscience, the largest basic neuroscience meeting in Europe, organised by FENS and hosted by the Danish Society for Neuroscience will attract an estimated 6000 international delegates. FENS mission is to advance research and education in neuroscience within and outside Europe, to facilitate interaction and coordination between its members. FENS represents 43 national and single discipline neuroscience societies with about 24,000 member scientists from 33 European countries. <http://www.fens.org/>

Further Reading

Physical illness and schizophrenia: a review of the literature. Leucht S, Burkard T, Henderson J, Maj M, Sartorius N. *Acta Psychiatr Scand*. 2007 Nov;116 (5):317-33. Review. PubMed PMID: 17919153.

Second-generation antipsychotic medications and risk of pneumonia in schizophrenia Kuo CJ (1), Yang SY, Liao YT, Chen WJ, Lee WC, Shau WY, Chang YT, Tsai SY, Chen *Schizophr Bull*. 2013 May; 39(3):648-57. doi: 10.1093/schbul/sbr202. Epub 2012 Jan 26