



ELSEVIER

Sleep Medicine 5 (2004) 161

**SLEEP
MEDICINE**

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Udine Special Section Guest Editorial

Introduction

RLS has acquired in recent years a considerable interest among both clinicians and researchers. First of all, it is a sleep disorder which has been clearly defined clinically, thanks to the remarkable work of the International Restless Legs Study Group.

Secondly, it has been recognized as a fairly common disorder, affecting, in its primary form, especially the elderly and, in its secondary form, as a symptom of many important diseases. Although variable in frequency and severity, RLS can subvert sleep considerably reducing the quality of life of affected patients.

Important studies began to unveil the modalities of genetic transmission of familial forms and gave important contributions to the understanding of the pathophysiology of this disorder. Dopaminomimetic drugs have shown to possess therapeutic potentials, able to change dramatically the quality of life of severely affected patients.

The frequency of RLS among patients suffering from Parkinson's disease and the therapeutic properties of dopaminomimetic drugs shed important light on the pathophysiology of this disorder. Other factors, however, like iron metabolism and changes caused by uraemia and dialysis, need to be considered for a better understanding of this disorder.

Thanks to the contribution of several scholars, some of whom are pioneers in this field, the present Supplement of *Sleep Medicine* examines the most relevant issues of RLS,

with particular emphasis on the clinical aspects, the results of genetic and pathophysiological studies, the associated conditions, and pharmacological treatment.

We are very grateful to all those who contributed with their papers to this Supplement. A special note of thanks to Dr Pierluigi Dolso for his assistance in the preparation of SleepUdine 2002, the Meeting which was the occasion for bringing together a group of very qualified experts, and for his invaluable help in collecting the manuscripts to be included in this Supplement.

We are also grateful to Ms Francesca Leita for her precious review of the English language of several manuscripts.

A very special thanks to Pharmacia Upjohn (now merged in Pfizer) who generously accepted to sponsor the Meeting held in the beautiful city of Udine, Italy, and to Dr Sudhansu Chokroverty, who kindly accepted to publish the edited papers of Sleep Udine 2002 as a Supplement to *Sleep Medicine*. Finally, we thank *Elsevier* for its editorial assistance.

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