

PSEUDOBULBAR AFFECT

FACT SHEET | AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA | SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SCLÉROSE LATÉRALE AMYOTROPHIQUE

WHAT IS PSEUDOBULBAR AFFECT?

Pseudobulbar affect (PBA), or emotional lability, is characterized by uncontrolled and inappropriate crying or laughing. Emotional lability is not a mood disorder, but an abnormal affective display that does not match an individual's true feelings.

PBA can be confused with depression, and although it is often not recognized as part of ALS, as many as 15 to 45 per cent of people living with ALS experience it. It is most common in people living with ALS who have difficulty swallowing and speaking. The symptom of uncontrolled crying is more common than uncontrolled laughing.

WHY DOES IT OCCUR?

PBA is thought to occur as a result of lost inhibition of the limbic motor neurons in the brain which control muscles involved in primitive vocalization.

CLINICAL FEATURES OF PBA:

- Episodes of uncontrollable laughing or crying which do not match the individual's actual feelings (often inappropriate or unrelated to the situation at hand)
- Crying may be prolonged and difficult to stop • Expression may be spontaneous or unmotivated
- Discussing topics with emotional content may trigger laughter or crying that is disproportionate to an appropriate level of emotion

MANAGEMENT:

PBA can have a significant impact on relationships, social interaction and overall quality of life. If not effectively managed, high levels of associated frustration and social anxiety can result in social withdrawal.

A new medication, called Nuedexta™ has recently been approved by the FDA for the treatment of PBA. Nuedexta™ is a mixture of the cough suppressant dextromethorphan and quinidine, which is used to treat heart arrhythmias. The drug's efficacy was proven through clinical trials, and is expected to be available by prescription by early 2011.

Antidepressants can also be used to treat PBA. Proper diagnosis, distinct from depression, is critical because these treatment approaches will differ. The following antidepressants are available to help treat PBA:

- Tricyclic antidepressants
- Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors
- Valproate
- Lithium

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