Fatigue in sarcoidosis; comparing American and Dutch patients

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Background
In some European studies fatigue was a major problem in sarcoidosis. Fatigue has not been studied before in an American population. The aim of this study was to compare the prevalence and severity of fatigue between American and European sarcoidosis patients.

Methods
Fatigue and lung function were assessed in 126 American and 121 Dutch sarcoidosis patients, who were matched for gender, age and chest radiographic stage. To measure fatigue, the Fatigue Assessment Scale (FAS) was applied. This is a self-administered general fatigue questionnaire consisting of 10 questions. Fatigue is defined by a score of ≥ 22 (possible range 10-50) with extreme fatigue being defined as a score of ≥ 35. Previous studies confirm that the FAS has good psychometric properties in sarcoidosis.

Results
Fatigue was reported by 90.9% (n=110) Dutch and 74.6% (n=94) American sarcoidosis patients, of which 20.7% of the former and 19.0% of the latter group reported feeling extremely fatigued. On average, the Dutch FAS scores were higher compared to the Americans (30.3 ± 8.1 vs 27.1 ± 7.4; p = 0.002). For both groups, fatigue was unrelated to gender, extrapulmonary sarcoidosis and treatment. In the Dutch patients, fatigue was related to symptoms indicative of small fiber neuropathy (r=0.39, p<0.0001).

Conclusion
Although extreme fatigue appeared to be more common in Dutch patients, also a substantial percentage of the American patients were (extremely) tired. The standard clinical parameters utilized to define severity of sarcoidosis did not predict the severity of fatigue. Future studies are mandatory to explain fatigue and the impact of treatment on fatigue in sarcoidosis.

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