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## **Aggregating the symptoms of superior semicircular canal dehiscence syndrome.**

Review to develop evidence-based symptom set.

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## ABSTRACT

**OBJECTIVE:** To aggregate symptoms reported by patients with superior canal dehiscence syndrome (SCDS) and to develop an evidence-based symptom set by performing a systematic review of the literature.

**METHODS:** Medline and PubMed databases were searched for articles that reported the preoperative symptoms of adult and pediatric patients with unilateral and bilateral SCDS. Articles were excluded if they reported on associated diseases or did not report symptoms.

**RESULTS:** Of the 397 articles retrieved, 66 were retained for quantitative analysis. Among 431 patients with SCDS, 91 symptom terms were reported. After combining synonymous terms, 22 symptoms were derived by consensus. Of the raw total number of reported symptoms 92.5% can be attributed to 5 common symptoms: spontaneous dizziness (51%), autophony (42.5%), pressure-induced vertigo (37.4%), hearing loss (39.9%) and sound-induced vertigo (42.7%).

**CONCLUSIONS:** This systematic review of symptoms reported by patients with SCDS identified a 22-item common symptom set. These items can be used to create an evidence-based patient-reported outcome measure to evaluate health-related quality of life in SCDS.

**Key Words:** Vestibular, Sensorineural hearing loss, Evidence-based medicine, Labyrinth diseases, review, patient reported outcome measures, vertigo, hearing loss

**Level of evidence:** NA

## INTRODUCTION

Superior canal dehiscence syndrome (SCDS) was first described by Lloyd Minor in 1998. An absence of bone overlying the superior semicircular canal creates a third mobile window into the inner ear in addition to the oval and round windows<sup>1</sup>. This bony defect can contribute to a wide variety of auditory and vestibular symptoms, including hearing loss, autophony (hearing one's own voice louder than external sounds)<sup>2</sup>, pulsatile and non-pulsatile tinnitus, aural fullness, bone conduction hyperacusis, imbalance, vertigo, and oscillopsia. Clinicians can also observe signs on physical examination such as Tullio phenomenon (vertigo and abnormal eye movements induced by loud sounds)<sup>3,4</sup> and Hennebert's sign (vertigo and nystagmus induced by pressure applied to the middle ear<sup>5,7</sup>). High-resolution CT imaging is important to detect a dehiscence in the otic capsule of the inner ear, but imaging alone is insufficient to diagnose SCDS<sup>8-13</sup>. Patients must also have symptoms consistent with SCDS as well as objective measures that the dehiscence is transmitting pressure, such as enhanced vestibular-evoked myogenic potential (VEMP) responses or negative bone conduction thresholds on pure tone audiometry. Presenting symptoms can vary and can include both auditory and vestibular symptoms or either auditory or vestibular symptoms alone<sup>14</sup>.

When patients report their symptoms are causing significant impairments to their quality of life (QoL), surgeons have offered a variety of surgical procedures<sup>9,15-18</sup>. Comparing the effectiveness of these procedures, however, is challenging, as there is no patient-reported outcome measure designed specifically for evaluating SCDS-specific health-related QoL. While there are symptom-based scales like the Dizziness Handicap Inventory (DHI) that address some aspects of the disease, SCDS includes unique symptoms not included in the available measures. No scale currently exists that captures the broad variety of patient complaints in SCDS.

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The aim of this study was to perform a systematic review of all symptoms reported by patients with SCDS, with the broader goal of enabling the eventual design of a condition-specific patient-reported outcome measure (PROM).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

*Search strategy.* The search was performed using the bibliographical databases PubMed, Medline, Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, Clinical Trials Registry, ISI Web of Knowledge and Web of Science on May 17, 2017 (LN, JS). Since no medical subject heading (MeSH) term is available for SCDS, the search was carried out using the keywords and logic: superior[All Fields] AND ("semicircular canals"[MeSH Terms] OR ("semicircular"[All Fields] AND canals"[All Fields]) OR "semicircular canals"[All Fields] OR ("semicircular"[All Fields] AND "canal"[All Fields]) OR "semicircular canal"[All Fields]) AND dehiscence[All Fields]. For a schematic overview of the search strategy see Figure 1.

*Selection criteria.* Articles (original studies, case series, and case reports) were included if they were written in the English language, involved humans, and reported on the presenting symptoms of adult and pediatric patients with either unilateral or bilateral SCDS. Articles were excluded if they did not report on patient symptoms associated with SCDS (n=55) or reported on symptoms associated with SCDS but in combination with other associated diseases (n=57). These associated diseases were posterior semicircular canal dehiscence, otosclerosis, migraine, vestibular schwannoma, chronic otitis media, meningo-encephalocele, lateral semicircular dysplasia, patulous Eustachian tube dysfunction, chronic ear disease, near dehiscence, cerebrospinal fluid otorrhea, otitic meningitis, enlarged vestibular aqueduct, Chiari type I malformation, meningioma, cerebral palsy, multiple semicircular canal dehiscences, glioblastoma and Pierre-Robin sequence. Articles were also excluded if classified as a systematic review (n=24), an editorial or comment on another study (n=10), or if they did not report the number of patients per symptom (n=10). Other exclusion criteria included studies focusing

primarily on radiographic techniques (n=21), VEMPs (n=23) or other diagnostic testing (n=23) or if containing a healthy subject or modeling third mobile window physiology (n=2). Figure 2 shows the flowchart for article exclusion with the number of articles excluded.

*Data extraction.* From the remaining 66 articles, the number of patients with SCDS and their preoperative symptoms were extracted. The risk of bias evaluation can be found in supplementary digital content e-1. Several questions were not applicable to our review because we were focusing on preoperative symptomatology and not on outcome and follow-up after interventions (incl. questions 8 and 9 on intervention and questions 11-19 on outcome and follow-up after surgery). A few patients were excluded because the authors identified comorbid diseases with symptoms that could overlap with those reported by patients with SCDS, e.g. demyelinating polyneuropathy<sup>3</sup>, meningo-encephalocele<sup>19</sup>, chronic otitis media<sup>20</sup>. All data extracted from each study was tabulated in Microsoft Office Excel 2016 (Microsoft Redmond Campus, Redmond, Washington, USA). A committee of subject-matter experts (VVR, PVDH) reviewed the list of symptoms and deliberated on symptoms that could be merged using a common term.

*Quantitative data synthesis.* The primary outcome of this systematic review was a detailed overview of symptoms associated with SCDS and a classification in order of relative frequency of the symptoms reported, shown as a percentage of the total number of included patients.



## RESULTS

The initial search resulted in 397 publications and was reduced to 309 by adding filters for English language and human species. After screening all abstracts against the study criteria 101 full-text articles were reviewed. Ultimately 66 articles including 431 patients were retained for quantitative analysis<sup>1-5,8,16,19-58</sup>. All article references can be found in supplementary digital content e-2. The number of patients included from each of these reports ranged from 1 to 35. In total, 91 symptom terms were retrieved from the 1253 patient symptoms reported. After combining synonymous terms (e.g. aural pressure – aural fullness), 22 specific symptom terms were identified: spontaneous dizziness, sound-induced vertigo, autophony, hearing loss, pressure-induced vertigo, aural pressure, nonpulsatile tinnitus, spontaneous pulsatile tinnitus, hyperacusis to environmental sounds, hyperacusis to bodily sounds, spontaneous oscillopsia/tilting, positional vertigo, motion intolerance, gaze-evoked tinnitus, pulsatile oscillopsia, headache/ear pain, drop attack, sound distortion, head movement induced pulsatile tinnitus, anxiety, hemifacial numbness and tinnitus aggravated by Valsalva. The 91 original symptom terms and their associated common terms are provided in Table 1. The total number of patients included from each article and the number of patients reporting each symptom in the 22-item short list is provided in supplementary digital content, table e-3: Quantitative short list.

In order to determine the relative prevalence of each symptom included on the short list, the occurrence of each symptom is divided by the total number of patients. When consolidating from 91 terms to a 22-term short list, there was a risk of counting those patients who reported multiple symptoms twice, prior to our consolidating symptoms under a common term. To eliminate double counting, all articles were reevaluated and the number of reported symptoms was adjusted. The percentage of the number of patients reporting a specific symptom over the total

number of patients is shown in Figure 3. We identified eight symptoms that were most frequently reported, with spontaneous dizziness, sound induced vertigo, autophony and hearing loss being the most common.

## DISCUSSION

Health services research has been promoting PROMs as indicators for quality of care, especially in areas where objective measures are lacking.<sup>59</sup> Many generic QoL evaluations have been developed such as the Short-Form 36 (SF36)<sup>60</sup> that can compare QoL among patients with different diseases and to healthy controls. Other instruments such as the Health Utility Index-Mark 3 (HUI3), which includes speech and hearing components, have been designed to assess clinical utility and to calculate cost-effectiveness<sup>61</sup>. Generic questionnaires, such as the SF-36, have been used to study changes of QoL after SCDS surgery and have demonstrated their responsiveness<sup>62</sup>. While valuable, these general QoL instruments, insufficiently evaluate disease-specific symptoms in conditions such as SCDS in which unique symptoms contribute to a patient's motivation to undergo surgery and changes in these symptoms determine whether they feel improved afterwards. Disease-specific PROMs are therefore a complementary tool that can be used to determine the effectiveness of an intervention.

When reviewing the literature, we found only one questionnaire on SCDS symptomatology, reported by Silverstein et al.<sup>18</sup> This questionnaire was generated in order to gather pre- and postoperative data for comparison of the efficacy of an intervention for round window reinforcement as a treatment for SCDS. The process for its development was unclear and lacks formal evaluation of reliability or validity.

Best practices in outcomes research methodology advise that development of a formal condition-specific scale should begin with a comprehensive review of the literature on all the reported symptoms for that condition. The objective of this systematic review, therefore, was to create an overview of all symptoms reported by patients with SCDS before surgery and without

concomitant pathology. From 66 articles that met inclusion criteria we obtained a list of 91 symptoms that was consolidated to a short list of 22 specific symptom terms. We subsequently identified eight symptoms that were most frequently reported, with spontaneous dizziness, sound induced vertigo, autophony and hearing loss among the most common. These symptoms will be further explored in structured interviews with patients to assist the development of a PROM for patients with SCDS.

The strength of this study is its comprehensive analysis of reported symptoms in the literature. The main limitation of this type of review, however, is the reliance on accurate assessment and reporting of symptoms by other practitioners. Patients may not mention all complaints due to their odd character, like hearing bodily sounds (e.g. eye movements, own footsteps, etc.), and it is often unclear the extent to which the physician inquired about relevant symptoms associated with SCDS. Moreover, many reports included patients that underwent surgery and those patients might present with symptoms that are more severe.

Articles that mentioned comorbid conditions with potentially overlapping symptoms were excluded; however, it is possible that in some articles included in this study the physician did not ask about associated diseases or these were not mentioned by the patient. Importantly, vestibular migraine, which is often seen in patients with SCDS can present with symptoms of spontaneous dizziness and tinnitus. Additionally, some symptoms classified as spontaneous may have triggers of which the patient may be unaware. The symptoms hemifacial numbness, anxiety and tinnitus aggravated by Valsalva were all reported only once, and should be considered in future studies.

The purpose of this study was to determine comprehensively the potential presenting symptoms in patients with SCDS as a step toward developing a novel outcome measure. Prospective studies will be used to evaluate the established symptom set before and after surgery to assess the importance of each term and its relevance for the patient. In order to develop an accurate assessment of patients presenting with SCDS and the prevalence of their presenting symptoms, however, prospective studies are also needed to review all these symptoms systematically, and provide data on symptom triggers, frequency, and duration. This future research could provide more insight into a minimum set of symptoms to enable accurate diagnosis of SCDS, in addition to imaging and electrophysiological data.

## **CONCLUSION**

This systematic review of symptoms reported by patients with SCDS identified a 22-item common symptom set. The 5 most frequently reported symptoms were spontaneous dizziness, sound-induced vertigo, autophony, hearing loss and pressure-induced vertigo. The items derived from this study can be used as the initial steps toward creating a novel validated PROM in patients with SCDS.

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## **Figure legends**

### **Figure 1.**

Schematic overview of the search strategy.

### **Figure 2.**

Flowchart for article exclusion with the number of articles excluded.

### **Figure 3.**

Proportion of symptoms reported by SCDS patients.

## **Supplementary digital content**

### **Supplementary digital content e-1.**

Risk of bias assessment

### **Supplementary digital content e-2.**

Articles retained for quantitative analysis.

### **Supplementary digital content e-3.**

Quantitative short list.