Symptoms and time to diagnosis in children with brain tumours.

Klitbo DM, Nielsen R, Illum NO, Wehner PS, Carlsen N.
Department of Paediatrics, Odense University Hospital, 5000 Odense C, Denmark. niels.illum@ouh.regionsyddanmark.dk.

Abstract
INTRODUCTION: Clinical symptoms in brain tumours in children are variable at onset and diagnosis is often delayed. Symptoms were investigated with regard to brain tumour localisation, prediagnostic symptomatic intervals and malignancy.

MATERIAL AND METHODS: Clinical data from children aged 0-17 years from Southern Denmark were analysed retrospectively and the results were correlated with data on prehospital symptoms obtained from interviews with parents and general practitioners.

RESULTS: A total of 55 children diagnosed during a period of five years were indentified and 31 interviews were obtained. A total of 19 (41%) of the tumours were supratentorial hemispheric and midline and 27 (59%) were infratentorial. At supratentorial localisations, 42% experienced vomiting as their first symptom followed by seizures in 37% and headache in 31%. At infratentorial localisations, headache occurred in 62%, vomiting in 55% and ataxia in 48% of the cases. The prediagnostic symptomatic interval had a median duration of 30 days with vomiting (range 3-330 days), a median of 75 days with headache (5-730 days) and a median of 75 days with ataxia (1-730 days).

CONCLUSION: Diagnosis is often late in relation to the presenting symptoms. An earlier diagnosis may be achieved if a brain tumour is considered as soon as any child presents with the relevant symptoms.

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