

Can psychogenic non-epileptic seizures be diagnosed by assessing behavior without concomitant EEG recording?

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Psychogenic non epileptic seizures are not uncommon. Any center involved in the management of episodic events which occur in epilepsy would be seeing about 5-25 % of persons with non epileptic events. About 5-15% would be PNES. The diagnosis of PNES is based on red flags obtained in the history of such patients. There are several clinical clues on history and examination. Over the years several biomarkers for the diagnosis have also been researched into. These could be serum prolactin, BDNF, non EEG markers of the autonomic nervous system and the gold standard which is the EEG being non ictal when the clinical event is happening. The gold standard has always been the unequivocal documentation of the habitual events having the clinical phenomenology of PNES and no ictal patterns on the simultaneous EEG. About 5 – 10 % of patients with epilepsy will have a combination of pseudo seizures with true seizures. These can be documented only with simultaneous video EEG. Just depending on manifest behavior could help circumvent costly and labor intensive video EEG monitoring in the epilepsy monitoring unit. Based on the clinical history and video of the patient during the event a reasonably confident diagnosis can be made. Practically most often doing a good clinical history and video observation with neuropsychological scales is enough to make a diagnosis of pseudoseizures.