Negative interpretation of ambiguous bodily information by patients with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis

Hosseinchi Parham, Ghalibaf Erfan, Dehghani Ali, Khatibi Ali

Abstract

Relapsing-remitting MS (RRMS) is characterised by the patients' experience of periods of exacerbation in symptoms. The fear associated with the relapse influence the quality of life in patients and their relationship with bodily experiences. Previous studies suggested that health anxiety (HA) contributes to fear of relapse but have not investigated cognitive mechanisms involved in developing and maintaining the fear of relapse in patients and we were interested to test this relationship. We used the online interpretation paradigm to investigate biased interpretation of ambiguous bodily information and its relationship to HA among patients and healthy controls (65 subjects in each group). Patients had higher levels of HA than controls. Patients also interpreted ambiguous bodily information more negatively than controls. There was a significant positive correlation between HA and negative interpretation of information in the whole sample. Among patients, HA mediated the relationship between interpretation bias and fear of relapse. Findings of this study suggest that negative interpretation bias can contribute to higher HA which in turn contributed to more fear of relapse among patients with RRMS. These findings have important implications for improving the quality of life in patients suffering from MS.