

Ataxia Clinic at Toronto Western Hospital

Significance of ataxia

Ataxia is a debilitating, rare neurological syndrome induced by the dysfunction of nerve cells in the cerebellum, an area of the brain which controls movement and balance. As the disease progresses, it affects a person's vision and ability to walk, talk, speak, swallow, or use fine motor skills. Ataxias can be caused by several different disorders, leading to severe disability and early mortality. As there are many different underlying causes for this syndrome, people living with ataxia are not always diagnosed properly or on time. In cases when ataxia is correctly diagnosed, patients often have varied multidisciplinary needs and experience a lack of specific therapeutic options or even symptomatic treatments.

Movement Disorders Clinic

The Edmond J. Safra Program in Parkinson's Disease is home to the Morton and Gloria Shulman Movement Disorders Clinic at Toronto Western Hospital, and is the largest clinic of its kind in Canada. Currently, there are nine faculty neurologists working with a number of fellows and nurses. We are a designated Parkinson's Foundation Centre of Excellence, with an outstanding international profile and reputation for excellence in research, teaching and patient care. Within the Clinic, Drs. Renato Munhoz and Elizabeth Slow are co-leading the Ataxia Clinic to diagnose and help patients with ataxia effectively manage their symptoms.

Goals of the Ataxia Clinic

The Ataxia Clinic accepts patient referrals from all of University Health Network's hospitals for diagnosis and management of symptoms, which provides an opportunity for excellent teaching and research experiences for both residents and fellows. Patients with ataxia often have multiple neurological systems affected, and the Ataxia Clinic requires and fosters collaboration between neurology sub-specialties, including neuromuscular, neuro-ophthalmology and movement disorders for improved diagnostic accuracy and patient management. In addition, the clinic is helping move ataxia research forward on multiple levels in order to help improve patient care and overall diagnosis.

In order to ensure that Ataxia Clinic will continue to provide exemplary care for the varied patient population with ataxia, Drs. Munhoz and Slow plan on creating and maintaining a database for ongoing patients. This will help identify patients who require further diagnoses and speed up wait times when new tests become available; determine if any basic, clinical or quality improvement research interventions lead to better outcomes; and ensure easy identification of potential patients for research trials for new therapies for ataxia, or disease-specific treatments. When new therapies become available, the database will help identify priority patients and the timely implementation of these therapeutics.

Support opportunity

The Ataxia Clinic at Toronto Western Hospital is a crucial clinical resource for the assessment and treatment of patients with ataxia. Help us to ensure that pioneering advances continue to be made for this patient population. Your donations will ensure the development of an integrated research database, clinical trials and ultimately provide enhanced treatment options.

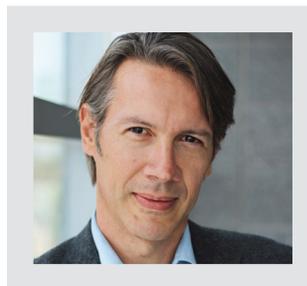
The establishment of a DNA bank is also a crucial component of furthering new research into ataxia and its various conditions, as many etiologies of this syndrome are likely genetic. This research avenue is one that Drs. Slow and Munhoz hope to pursue within the clinic, as well as securing an additional research fellow to provide critical support as they explore different therapies and treatment options.

DR. RENATO MUNHOZ

Dr. Renato Munhoz is an Associate Professor of Neurology at the University of Toronto. He has focused most of his efforts on clinical management of patients with ataxia and other movement disorders. His team is currently working on the protocol for the assessment of symmetry of distribution of motor symptoms and signs in genetically determined ataxias, which are caused by certain defective genes that make abnormal proteins, and are expressed differently depending on the gene. This protocol will be part of a study that will, for the first time, help us understand how and why hereditary ataxias are prone to causing motor impairments.

DR. ELIZABETH SLOW

Dr. Elizabeth Slow is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of Toronto. She teaches future neurologists, geriatricians, rehabilitation physicians, long-term care facility doctors and family doctors towards the goal of educating health professionals to more appropriately recognize and treat movement disorders. In addition to Dr. Slow's teaching responsibilities, she has been a co-lead with Dr. Munhoz on establishing the Ataxia Clinic. Several publications have already resulted from this clinic describing unique case presentations.



Dr. Renato Munhoz and Dr. Elizabeth Slow, co-directors of the Ataxia Clinic.

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