DISORDERS OF NERVOUS SYSTEM FUNCTIONS IN CHRONIC ETHYL ALCOHOL INTOXICATION: CHRONIC ALCOHOL ABUSE IN WOMEN BASED ON CASES DIAGNOSED WITH WERNICKE-KORSAKOFF ENCEPHALOPATHY

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome is a neurological and psychiatric degenerative brain disorder manifested by a sudden occurrence of symptoms caused by deficiency of vitamin B1. Discrimination is generally made between neurological symptoms termed "Wernicke encephalopathy" and psychiatric disorders termed "Korsakoff amnesic syndrome". This paper presents four cases of long-term (from several to over a dozen years) alcohol-dependence syndrome in women diagnosed with Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome.

Material and Methods: The study included 4 women aged 33–63. In 2004, they were hospitalized in the Hospital for Neurological and Psychiatric Patients during a period of three months.

Results: Deficiency of vitamin B1 is most frequently induced by chronic alcohol abuse. Metabolism of ethyl alcohol differs between men and women. Serum alcohol concentration after drinking equivalent amount of alcohol per body mass is higher in women than in men. Moreover, alcohol abuse in women leads to a more rapid development of alcohol-dependence syndrome, and thus to an earlier emergence of multiorgan complications.

Conclusions: The fact that as many as four cases of acute neurological and psychiatric complications were hospitalized in such a short period (three months) indicates the need to pay closer attention to a growing number of women addicted to alcohol as well as to related irreversible damage to the nervous system.

Key words: chronic ethyl alcohol intoxication, Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, Wernicke's encephalopathy

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