Who is the Most Memorable American President?

Episodic vs. semantic memory loss and president recall in Alzheimer's disease

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Background/Rationale

Episodic memory loss is a hallmark of Alzheimer’s disease (AD), with recall of recent events becoming progressively difficult. We assessed a commonly used tool, the recollection of U.S. presidents, in evaluating episodic vs. semantic memory loss among AD patients compared to spouse controls.

Methods

Thirty-six patients (12 men, 24 women) with possible or probable AD were asked to “give the names of five U.S. presidents” and concurrently administered the MMSE. Twenty-three spouses (12 men, 11 women) were controls. The year 1980 demarcated ‘remote’ vs. ‘recent’ presidents.

Results

Patients were older, had lower MMSE scores (p<0.001), and recalled fewer presidents than controls (p<0.001) after controlling for age. Among patients, men were more educated than women (p<0.05) and recalled more presidents (p<0.001). No gender differences were observed in controls.

Conclusions

Patients with Alzheimer’s disease preferentially recalled remote presidents, supporting retention of semantic memory in this group. There were no gender differences between groups.

References


Table 1: Alzheimer's Patients vs. Controls: Demographics & President Recall Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Patients (N=36)</th>
<th>Controls (N=23)</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>78.47 ± 9.24</td>
<td>73.52 ± 7.91</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.89 ± 0.67</td>
<td>2.26 ± 0.96</td>
<td>NS</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMSE scores</td>
<td>24.53 ± 4.87</td>
<td>28.70 ± 1.66</td>
<td>0.005</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. of presidents recalled (out of 5)</td>
<td>3.50 ± 1.58</td>
<td>5.00 ± 0.00</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

Patients with Alzheimer’s disease preferentially recalled remote presidents, supporting the retention of semantic memory in this group. There were no gender differences between groups.

References