TABLE 459-2 PATTERNS OF NEUROPATHIC DISORDERS

Pattern 1: Symmetric proximal and distal weakness with sensory loss
Consider: inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (GBS and CIDP)
Pattern 2: Symmetric distal sensory loss with or without distal weakness
Consider: cryptogenic or idiopathic sensory polyneuropathy (CSPN), diabetes mellitus and other metabolic disorders, drugs, toxins, familial (HSAN), CMT, amyloidosis, and others
Pattern 3: Asymmetric distal weakness with sensory loss
With involvement of multiple nerves
Consider: multifocal CIDP, vasculitis, cryoglobulinemia, amyloidosis, sarcoid, infectious (leprosy, Lyme, hepatitis B, C, or E, HIV, CMV), HNPP, tumor infiltration
With involvement of single nerves/regions
Consider: may be any of the above but also could be compressive mononeuropathy, plexopathy, or radiculopathy
Pattern 4: Asymmetric proximal and distal weakness with sensory loss
Consider: polyradiculopathy or plexopathy due to diabetes mellitus, meningeal carcinomatosis or lymphomatosis, hereditary plexopathy (HNPP, HNA), idiopathic
Pattern 5: Asymmetric distal weakness without sensory loss
With upper motor neuron findings
Consider: motor neuron disease
Without upper motor neuron findings
Consider: progressive muscular atrophy, juvenile monomelic amyotrophy (Hirayama's disease), multifocal motor neuropathy, multifocal acquired motor axonopathy
Pattern 6: Symmetric sensory loss and distal areflexia with upper motor neuron findings
Consider: Vitamin B_{12}, vitamin E, and copper deficiency with combined system degeneration with peripheral neuropathy, hereditary leukodystrophies (e.g., adrenomyeloneuropathy)
Pattern 7: Symmetric weakness without sensory loss
With proximal and distal weakness
Consider: SMA
With distal weakness
Consider: hereditary motor neuropathy ("distal" SMA) or atypical CMT
Pattern 8: Asymmetric proprioceptive sensory loss without weakness
Consider causes of a sensory neuronopathy (ganglionopathy):
Cancer (paraneoplastic)
Sjögren's syndrome
Idiopathic sensory neuronopathy (possible GBS variant)
Cisplatin and other chemotherapeutic agents
Vitamin B_6 toxicity
HIV-related sensory neuronopathy
Pattern 9: Autonomic symptoms and signs
Consider neuropathies associated with prominent autonomic dysfunction:
Hereditary sensory and autonomic neuropathy
Amyloidosis (familial and acquired)
Diabetes mellitus
Idiopathic pandysautonomia (may be a variant of Guillain-Barré syndrome)
Porphyria
HIV-related autonomic neuropathy
Vincristine and other chemotherapeutic agents

Abbreviations: CIDP, chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy; CMT, Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease; CMV, cytomegalovirus; GBS, Guillain-Barré syndrome; HIV, human immunodeficiency virus; HNA, hereditary neuralgic amyotrophy; HNPP, hereditary neuropathy with liability to pressure palsies; HSAN, hereditary sensory and autonomic neuropathy; SMA, spinal muscular atrophy.

muscle strength, deep tendon reflexes, and normal nerve conduction studies, a small-fiber neuropathy is likely. This is important, because the most likely cause of small-fiber neuropathies, when one is identified, is diabetes mellitus or glucose intolerance. Amyloid neuropathy should be considered as well in such cases, but most of these small-fiber neuropathies remain idiopathic in nature despite extensive evaluation.

Severe proprioceptive loss also narrows the differential diagnosis. Affected patients will note imbalance, especially in the dark. A neurologic examination revealing a dramatic loss of proprioception with vibration loss and normal strength should alert the clinician to consider a sensory neuronopathy/ganglionopathy (Table 459-2, Pattern 8). In particular, if this loss is asymmetric or affects the arms more than the legs, this pattern suggests a non-length-dependent process as seen in sensory neuronopathies.

4. Is There Evidence of Upper Motor Neuron Involvement? If the patient presents with symmetric distal sensory symptoms and signs suggestive of a distal sensory neuropathy, but there is additional evidence of symmetric upper motor neuron involvement (Chap. 30), the physician should consider a disorder such as combined system degeneration with neuropathy. The most common cause for this pattern is vitamin B_{12} deficiency, but other causes of combined system degeneration with neuropathy should be considered (e.g., copper deficiency, HIV infection, severe hepatic disease, adrenomyeloneuropathy).

5. What is the Temporal Evolution? It is important to determine the onset, duration, and evolution of symptoms and signs. Does the disease have an acute (days to 4 weeks), subacute (4–8 weeks), or chronic (>8 weeks) course? Is the course monophasic, progressive, or relapsing? Most neuropathies are insidious and slowly progressive in nature. Neuropathies with acute and subacute presentations include GBS, vasculitis, and radiculopathies related to diabetes or Lyme disease. A relapsing course can be present in CIDP and porphyria.

6. Is There Evidence for a Hereditary Neuropathy? In patients with slowly progressive distal weakness over many years with very little in the way of sensory symptoms yet with significant sensory deficits on clinical examination, the clinician should consider a hereditary neuropathy (e.g., Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease [CMT]). On examination, the feet may show arch and toe abnormalities (high or flat arches, hammertoes); scoliosis may be present. In suspected cases, it may be necessary to perform both neurologic and electrophysiologic studies on family members in addition to the patient.

7. Does the Patient Have Any Other Medical Conditions? It is important to inquire about associated medical conditions (e.g., diabetes mellitus, systemic lupus erythematosus); preceding or concurrent infections (e.g. diarrheal illness preceding GBS); surgeries (e.g., gastric bypass and nutritional neuropathies); medications (toxic neuropathy), including over-the-counter vitamin preparations (B_6); alcohol; dietary habits; and use of dentures (e.g., fixatives contain zinc that can lead to copper deficiency).

PATTERN RECOGNITION APPROACH TO NEUROPATHIC DISORDERS

Based on the answers to the seven key questions, neuropathic disorders can be classified into several patterns based on the distribution or pattern of sensory, motor, and autonomic involvement (Table 459-2). Each pattern has a limited differential diagnosis. A final diagnosis is established by using other clues such as the temporal course, presence of other disease states, family history, and information from laboratory studies.

ELECTRODIAGNOSTIC STUDIES

The electrodiagnostic (EDx) evaluation of patients with a suspected peripheral neuropathy consists of nerve conduction studies (NCS) and needle electromyography (EMG). In addition, studies of autonomic function can be valuable. The electrophysiologic data provide additional information about the distribution of the neuropathy that will support or refute the findings from the history and physical examination; they can confirm whether the neuropathic disorder is a mononeuropathy, multiple mononeuropathy (mononeuropathy multiplex), radiculopathy, plexopathy, or generalized polyneuropathy. Similarly, EDx evaluation can ascertain whether the process involves only sensory fibers, motor fibers, autonomic fibers, or a combination of these. Finally, the electrophysiologic data can help distinguish axonopathies from myelinopathies as well as axonal degeneration secondary to ganglionopathies from the more common length-dependent axonopathies.