

A Brief History of Post-Polio Syndrome in the United States

Background

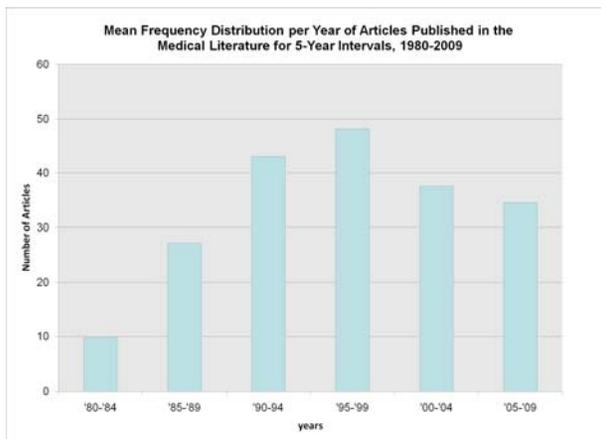
We describe the history of the late effects of polio in this country from 1980 to the present in the context of the broader and much longer history of acute poliomyelitis.

Methods

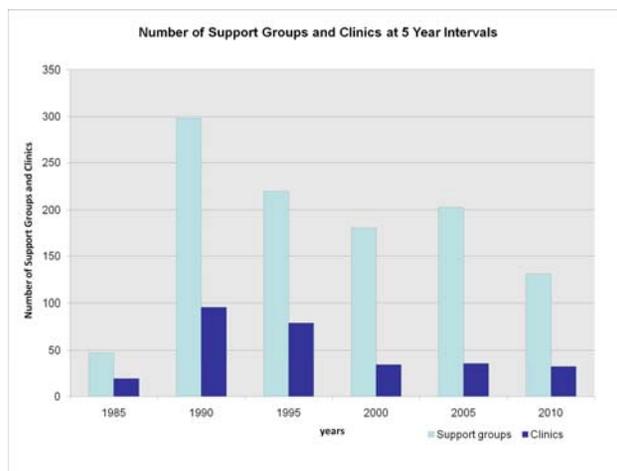
We reviewed books, articles, conference proceedings and other relevant historical resources that dealt with polio-related issues. Using search terms for articles that met any of three criteria, we reviewed Ovid Medline and the Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature databases without language restrictions from January 1, 1980 through December 31, 2009. The mean number of articles published per year was calculated for 5 year intervals beginning in 1980. In addition, data was compiled from directories published annually by Post-Polio Health International (PHI) on the number of post-polio support groups and polio-dedicated clinics at 5 year intervals from 1985-2010.

Results

During the interval 1980-1984, an average of 9.8 articles was published each year (Figure 1). This number increased dramatically during the late 1980s and 90s peaking during the years 1995-1999 when a mean of 48.2 articles was published each year. This figure declined over the next 14 years to an average of 34.6 articles published per year for the interval 2005-2009



Support groups and clinics showed a similar pattern of rise and fall with a maximum of 298 support groups and 96 clinics in 1990 and a decline to 131 and 32, respectively, by 2010 (Figure 2). Finally, we describe the cultural context and key issues and events that helped shape the 'post-polio era' in American medicine.



Discussion

These data reflect a well-defined history of post-polio in this country that spanned approximately 30 years. During the 1980s and early 90s, there was a period of optimism that energized research, clinical and self-help initiatives. As the limits of these efforts became apparent during the late 90s and early 2000s, resources and activities declined resulting in frustration and disillusionment within the post-polio community as it continued to age and decrease in size.

Conclusions

The late effects of polio were unexpected sequelae of the mid-century polio epidemics in this country that resulted in a rise and fall of polio-related activities confined to a span of roughly 3 decades. Nevertheless, there are still many thousands of polio survivors who will continue to need psychiatric services for many years to come.

References

1. Paul JR. A history of poliomyelitis. 1971. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
2. Olson DA, Henig E, ed. What ever happened to the polio patient? Chicago, IL: Rehabilitation Institution of Chicago; 1981.
3. Dalakas MC, Bartfeld H, Kurland LT, eds. The post-polio syndrome: Advances in the pathogenesis and treatment. Ann NY Acad Sci, 753:1995
4. Gonzalez H, Olsson T, Borg K. Management of postpolio syndrome. Lancet Neurol 2010; 9: 634-42.