The 2008–2012 French Alzheimer Plan: Description of the National Alzheimer Information System

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Abstract. In France, one of the aims of the current national Alzheimer's disease plan is to collect data from all memory centers (memory units, memory resource and research centers, independent neurologists) throughout the country. Here we describe the French Alzheimer Information System and present a 'snapshot' of the data collected throughout the country during the first year of operation. We analyzed all data transmitted by memory centers between January 2010 and December 2010. Each participating center is required to transmit information on patients to the French National Alzheimer dataBank (BNA). This involves completing a computer file containing 31 variables corresponding to a limited data set on AD (CIMA: Corpus minimum d'information Alzheimer). In 2010, the BNA received data from 320 memory centers relating to 199,113 consultations involving 118,776 patients. An analysis of the data shows that the initial MMSE (Mini Mental State Examination) mean score for patients in France was 16.8 points for Alzheimer's disease, 25.7 points for mild cognitive impairment, and 18.8 points for 'related disorders related disorders. The BNA will provide longitudinal data that can be used to assess the needs of individual local health areas and size specialized care provision in each regional health scheme. By contributing to the BNA, the memory centers enhance their clinical activity and help to advance knowledge in epidemiology and medical research in the important field of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Keywords: Alzheimer's disease, dementia, medical practice, public health

Alzheimer's disease (AD) and related disorders (vascular dementia and dementia of unknown etiology) are a major public health issue. In 2003, the estimated prevalence of these pathologies based on the PAQUID [1] and EURODEM [2] cohorts ranged from 5.7%

for subjects aged 75–79 years to 38.4% for subjects aged over 85 years. In Western Europe, the estimated annual incidence in subjects aged 60 years and over is 9 per 1000 [3]. In 2004, an extrapolation based on the available prevalence data indicated that the number of people aged 65 years and older with dementia in France could be in excess of 850,000 [4], a figure that it is suggested to double by 2040 [3]. In view of the scale of these pathologies [5–7], a third Alzheimer Plan was launched in 2008 (French National Plan for "Alzheimer"

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and Related Disorders" 2008–2012) [8] to strengthen research on AD and related disorders, promote earlier diagnosis, and improve both patient management and support for carers.

The French National Plan for "Alzheimer and related disorders" 2008–2012 comprises 44 measures. Measure 34 is entitled "Setting up epidemiological surveillance and follow up". Its objective is to enable to through the ministry of health and regional health agency, a specialist memory care provision to be adapted through regional care organization schemes. Measure 34 aims to provide epidemiological data as well as activity indicators of the centers. To this end, it is important for each region to have activity data for specialized centers, data on patients' characteristics, and care quality indicators [9]. To achieve this objective, several steps were required: specification and definition of the data to be collected, computerization of memory units and volunteer independent neurologists, and finally the creation of a national database (known as the "BNA" the National Alzheimer data Bank) consolidating all the information obtained from specialized centers. The BNA comprises a centralized information system to collect data from participating centers and a data management system to ensure the reliability of the information collected. The information collected by the BNA consists of a limited data set, defined by national consensus.

This measure provides for the setting up of a nationwide system for collecting activity data and for epidemiological surveillance and follow-up within specialized centers (memory units and centers and independent specialists). This article presents the information system that was set up and describes the characteristics of the patients with AD or related disorders followed up in the various centers taking part in the collection of data between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2010.

METHODS

Since the implementation of the first Alzheimer Plan in France in 2001, the organization of testing and follow up for AD has been based on a nationwide network comprising 400 'memory units' (CMs: Consultations mémoire) and 27 'memory resource and research centers' (CMRRs: Centres mémoire de ressources et de recherche). The CMRRs, located in teaching hospitals, also have teaching and research functions and are responsible for supervising the CMs. This public health service network is supplemented by independent

specialists (neurologists, geriatricians, and psychiatrists), who also play a role in the diagnosis and follow up of AD patients.

CIMA, the Alzheimer limited data set (CIMA: Corpus Minimum d'Information Alzheimer)

The first step in implementing Measure 34 was to determine what data to collect on patients attending these centers. The data set on AD had to meet two very general constraints: it needed to contain the appropriate information to allow good quality statistical processing but had to be sufficiently short so as not to place too heavy a constraint on the centers taking part.

Development of the CIMA began in September 2007 with a working group comprised of representatives of the CMRRs and CMs. In 2008, the information set was completed and validated by the Directorate General of Care Provision (DGOS: Direction Générale de l'Offre de Soins), which is in charge of supervising Measure 34. The full list of items, with the possible choices for each one, and a glossary of definitions can be accessed on the CMRR-Nice website (http://www.cmrr-nice.fr/) or the website of the National Alzheimer Plan 2008–2012 (http://www. plan-alzheimer.gouv.fr/mesure-no34.html). The first part of the CIMA consists of background information on the patient. This includes information on the patient's identity and geographical location, some of these details subsequently being used to render the file anonymous. There are also data on the category of social care (i.e., "ALD" [long-term illness] and "APA" [personal autonomy allowance]) and the diagnosis. For the diagnosis, two levels are proposed; level 1, corresponding to a global diagnosis (presence or absence of dementia or other cognitive impairment), and level 2, corresponding to a specific diagnosis based on a classification drawn up by the National Federation of CMRRs in relation with the ICD 10. The second part provides details of the 'procedure' carried out during the patient's visit to the center, i.e., a consultation, a neuropsychological assessment, a day-hospital visit for a diagnostic work-up, or a group session. The only clinical characteristics required are the Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE) [10] and the Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) [11], which must be carried out for each patient at least once a year. Lastly, there are items on the type of social welfare. The CIMA currently has 31 variables to be completed (Table 1). For every procedure and every patient, a CIMA must be transmitted to the BNA. Once a year, each center is also required to submit information on its

Table 1 Limited data set on Alzheimer's disease (CIMA; Corpus minimum d'information Alzheimer)

Data on the patient

- 1. Surname
- 2 Last name
- 3. First name
- Date of birth
- 5. Departement of birth
- 6. Code for commune of birth
- 7. Sex
- 8. New patient
- 9. Patient referred by
- 10. Present lifestyle
- 11. Geographical location with regard to the center
- 12. Educational level
- 13. A.P.Aa
- 14. A.L.Db
- 15. Patient protection measures
- 16. Diagnosis: Level 1
- 17. Diagnosis: Level 2

Data on the procedure

- 18. Date of procedure
- 19. Type of procedure
- 20. The procedure is performed within the framework of a support mission (for CMRR only)
- 21. If yes: Type of research protocol
- 22. If yes: Type of visit protocol
- 23. The procedure is being carried out within the framework of a research protocol:
- 24. Mini-Mental Test Examination:
- 25 IADLS
- 26. Pharmacological treatment
- 27. Serious adverse event
- 28. Psycho social intervention and rehabilitation
- 29. Follow-up status
- 30. Date of entry into residential care (where applicable)
- 31. Date of death (where applicable)

characteristics (type of center, number of ½ days open, number of full-time equivalent staff).

The BNA is thus the national database which collects all the limited data sets recorded by CMs, CMRRs, and volunteer independent specialists.

The computer application "Calliope" is made available to centers for data entry, though they can opt for any one of a number of alternatives (Rapid, Onyx, 4D Nord, Alpha, etc.). Every time a patient visits a center, the physician completes a patient file specifically designed for AD and related disorders, which can be filled out online using a fully web-based application (i.e., physicians can enter the data online via a web browser without needing to have the application installed on their computer). Once the data has been entered, the application extracts the required

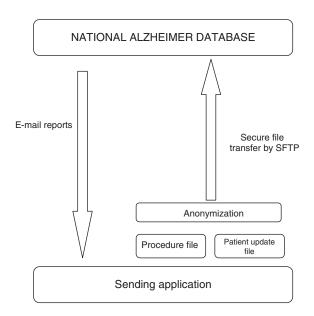


Fig. 1. Flow of data to the National Alzheimer Database (BNA).

limited data set and transmits it to the BNA (see Fig. 1). The physician or user normally enters the data during the consultation, though this is sometimes done after. The system will indicate the items to be corrected if it detects any inconsistencies or gaps in the data.

The firm Ellipse was contracted to develop the database (the BNA), which had to be able to collect all the limited data sets, anonymize the data, and enable statistical analyses to be carried out. The server hosting the BNA is located on the premises of Nice University Hospital and is supervised by the Computer Systems Department, which is licensed to hold personal health data, thereby ensuring the necessary protection for this type of data. Data administration is carried out by the Public Health Department of Nice University Hospital, which ensures the consistency and operation of the database in cooperation with the French Institute for Public Health Surveillance (Institut de veille sanitaire) and DGOS. This institutional collaboration is governed by an agreement signed in December 2008, defining the duties of each partner and the expected targets for data collection during the subsequent months. The BNA team has a permanent staff consisting of a statistician in charge of data management and a computer systems manager. Other staff is composed of clinicians working in the Nice CMRR and the Public Health Department.

A key point in the development of the system is that, since 20 May 2010, all the participating centers have been provided with the necessary online tools. Each center now has its own access code enabling it to

^aPersonal autonomy allowance (Allocation personnalisée d'Autonomie).

^bLong-term illness (Affection de longue durée).

^cInstrumental Activities of Daily Living.

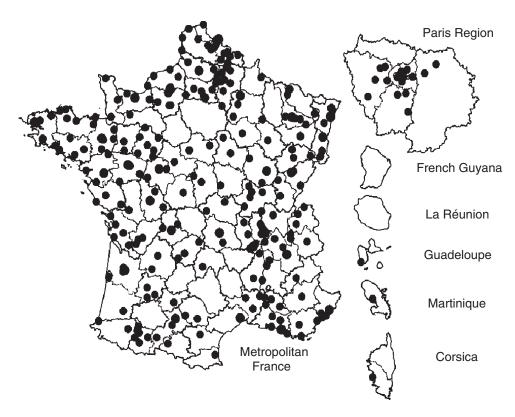


Fig. 2. Distribution of memory centers in France and overseas regions that submitted at least one limited data set (CIMA) during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2010.

query the national database at any time and also access its own consolidated and anonymized data.

RESULTS

Of the 427 memory centers in France, 320 centers (75%) submitted at least one limited data set (CIMA) to the BNA (27/27 CMRRs and 263/399 CMs) in 2010. Thirty-three independent neurologists participated in data collection. Figure 2 shows the distribution of participating CMRRs and CMs in France, including French overseas départements (administrative districts).

Between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2010, 118,776 patients (women: 63.2%; men: 36.8%) consulted a center participating in the collection of data for the BNA. A total of 199,113 CIMA were submitted (Fig. 3). Patients had a mean age of 77.4 years (women: 78.5 years; men: 75.6 years). The mean age for AD patients is 82.2, 79.5 for patients with related disorders, and 76 for patients with mild cognitive impairment (MCI). Of the patients who consulted at a CMRR, 19.4% lived over 50 km from the center; this compares

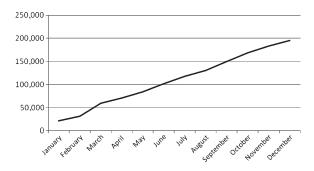


Fig. 3. Increase in the number of limited data sets (CIMA) transmitted to the National Alzheimer Database (BNA) between 1 January and 31 December 2010.

to only 5.3% in the case of patients who consulted at a CM.

Table 2 shows the distribution of diagnoses in decreasing order of frequency. Out of a total of 118,776 patients, AD accounted for 27.3% of diagnoses, related disorders for 20.1%, and diagnoses pending for 25.8%. MCI accounted for 8.4%. There were marked differences in the distribution of diagnoses by type of center. The proportion of patients diagnosed with AD was higher for patients consulting independent neurologists

Table 2 Diagnoses of patients recorded in the National Alzheimer Database (BNA), by diagnostic category

Diagnosis	%	No.
Alzheimer disease	27.3	32,426
Related disorders	20.1	23,861
Mild cognitive impairment	8.4	9,958
Depression and other psychiatric disorders	7.5	8,950
Subjective memory complaint	6.5	7,751
Other neurological disorders	4.2	4,970
Other	0.2	212
Diagnoses pending	25.8	30,684

Distribution of diagnoses/categories

Category	Diagnosis
Alzheimer's disease	Alzheimer's disease
Related disorders	Mixed dementia + Other vascular dementia + Vascular dementia + Fronto – temporal dementia + Creutzfeldt – Jakob disease + Huntington's disease + Parkinson's disease dementia + Dementia with Lewy bodies + HIV dementia + Limbic encephalitis + Progressive supranuclear palsy + Cortico basal degeneration + Primary progressive aphasia + Semantic dementia + Posterior cortical atrophy + Normal – pressure hydrocephalus + Dementia not classified elsewhere
Diagnosis pending	Diagnosis pending
Mild cognitive impairment	Amnesic MCI + Other MCI
Depression and other psychiatric disorders	Organic brain disorder directly related to the use of alcohol or other toxic substances + Psychotic disturbances + Isolated depressive symptoms + Recurrent depressive symptoms + Depressive/anxiety disorders + Anxiety disorders (including anxiety disorders such as OCD) + Post traumatic stress disorder + Other psychiatric disturbances (amnesia, psychogenic, simulation, etc.)
Subjective memory complaint	Memory complaint
Other neurological disorders	Organic brain disorder directly related to a disease (e.g., metabolic, endocrine, hepatic, respiratory, SAS, renal, inflammatory, cancer) + Other neurological disorders (tumors, post-surgical, aneurysms) + Parkinson's + Multiple sclerosis + Epilepsy+Head injury
Other	Iatrogenic

(39.9%) than for those seen in CM (31.2%) or CMRR (24.3%). Figure 4 shows the mean scores obtained at the initial MMSE for patients in each of the three types of center. The initial MMSE mean score for patients in France was 16.8 points for AD, 25.7 points for MCI, and 18.8 points for related disorders.

In terms of referrals reported by centers participating in the BNA, 86.9% of the patients seen by independent neurologists were referred by their

general practitioner; the comparable percentage for CMs was 66.7% and for CMRRs 50.4%.

Most of the patients with a diagnosis of AD and related disorders had a MMSE from 10 to 26 and the proportion of AD patients with a MMSE lower than 10 is equal to 12.6% (Table 3). The proportion of patients with subjective memory complaint diagnosis with a MMSE less than 27 is equal to 31.0%, and 95.7% of the patients with MCI account for a score above 20.

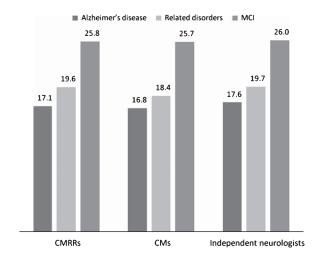


Fig. 4. Mini-Mental State Examination: mean score by type of center (CMRRs, CMs, independent neurologists) for the three main diagnostic categories: Alzheimer's disease, related disorders, mild cognitive impairment (MCI).

Finally, Table 4 shows the repartition of the patients according to their way of living.

DISCUSSION

The BNA set up under the National Plan for "Alzheimer's Disease and Related disorders" 2008–2012, provides a 'life-size' view, for an entire country, of persons consulting specialized memory centers and independent neurologists for memory disorders.

The initial data derived from the BNA indicate that the centers receive a wide variety of patients, as shown by the different types of diagnoses. Indeed, about 30% of diagnoses were for AD and 20% for related disorders, these two categories thus accounting for just over half of all diagnoses. The remaining patients comprised MCI, diagnoses pending, and other diagnoses.

 $\label{eq:Table 3} \mbox{Distribution of the diagnosis by MMSE categories}$

	MMSE			
	0-9 (%)	10-19 (%)	20-26 (%)	27+ (%)
Alzheimer's disease	12.6	49.1	34.5	3.7
Related disorders	8.5	41.5	39.5	10.5
Mild cognitive impairment	0.2	4.1	47.0	48.7
Depression and other psychiatric disorders	1.1	10.0	37.7	51.1
Subjective memory complaint	0.8	3.8	26.4	68.9
Other neurological disorders	1.8	12.3	39.7	46.2
Other	2.9	13.9	48.0	35.3
Diagnoses pending	2.5	24.5	45.2	27.7

Table 4 Distribution of the places to live by diagnosis

	Home alone (%)	Home with help (%)	Hospital (%)	Nursing home (%)	Other (%)
Alzheimer disease	32.3	48.7	1.0	16.1	2.0
Related disorders	28.4	51.2	2.4	16.4	1.6
Mild cognitive impairment	34.1	60.0	0.6	3.7	1.6
Depression and other psychiatric disorders	34.9	52.7	2.9	7.0	2.6
Subjective memory complaint	33.6	60.6	0.9	2.5	2.5
Other neurological disorders	25.3	64.7	2.9	4.2	2.9
Other	29.7	50.0	6.6	9.4	4.2
Diagnoses pending	34.9	51.1	3.1	7.8	3.1

Distribution of the places to live

Category	
Home alone	At home alone, at home alone with family geographically close
Home with help	At home with spouse/husband, In family home
Hospital	General hospital, Psychiatric hospital
Nursing home	Medical Nursing home, home for elderly people
Other	Host family, Housing Home

This finding also raises questions about the commonly accepted figure for the prevalence of this pathology among all forms of dementia, since AD is generally the principal cause of dementia, at least in 70% of cases [15].

This first analysis of the BNA also shows that, in 2010, among the 118,776 persons who consulted specialist memory centers (hospital-based or otherwise) participating in the BNA, 56,287 had AD or related disorders (66,245 with MCI). This number is far smaller than the estimated figure for the prevalence of AD and related disorders provided by the PAQUID study, namely 850,000 persons in France [12, 13]. Several factors could account for this result. The first is directly related to the way the BNA operates. As the BNA only started to function in October 2009, not all memory centers were actively participating in 2010 and, in addition, independent specialists were under-represented. Furthermore, it is likely that the participating centers were still not entering a complete record of their activity in the BNA. A quality control procedure to check the exhaustiveness of data entry at source is currently in progress and should provide a clearer assessment of the extent of this problem. The second factor concerns the number of AD cases that remain undiagnosed. Indeed, studies by Dartigues et al. suggest that 50% of AD cases go undiagnosed. It would appear that only a third of cases are detected at an early stage of the disease. These authors also estimate that nearly 27% of advanced cases remains undetected [12, 14, 15]. The third factor is that a part of the studied population consists of residents in nursing homes (EHPAD: Etablissements d'Hébergement pour Personnes Agées Dépendantes). Little information is currently available within the BNA on this subject. In fact the BNA reveals that very few patients are referred by these nursing homes. It should be expected that older age alone is also an important factor for not referring to a CM. Lastly, according to the report of an evaluation mission on CMs and CMRRs by the Directorate for Hospitalization and Healthcare Management (DHOS: Direction de l'Hospitalisation et de l'Organisation des Soins) [16], there are considerable variations in the way memory centers are organized. Even though they are also responsible for follow-up activities, it may well be that some centers are currently prioritizing their diagnostic activities to the detriment of follow-up activities. Since our study was confined to the year 2010, we were unable to estimate the number of persons returning each year for a follow-up consultation in the context of AD or related disorders. However, since the BNA is designed to allow for the longitudinal, prospective study of patients in France, we should soon have a clearer view of the frequency with which patients visit the various categories of memory centers, and also refine the analysis of types of care, by category of memory center.

Another important finding concerns the degree of severity of the disease in patients presenting with AD. In terms of the mean score on the first MMSE performed at the time of diagnosis, Ramaroson [17] reported a mean score of 19 points at diagnosis in the PAQUID cohort, whereas the mean score is 17.1 across all the centers currently participating in the BNA. This confirms that patients in France are still consulting at too advanced a stage of the disease.

The results we have presented must be interpreted with caution. Indeed, since the BNA system came into operation gradually, some centers transmitted nearly 12 months of data to the BNA during the year 2010, whereas others submitted only three or four months of usable data. Discrepancies of this type also existed between the different categories of center. The CMRRs were the first centers to participate. As a result, the volume of their activity is most likely over-represented, at least with regard to the data for 2010, the first year in which the BNA was in operation. The CMs are both more numerous and more disparate in their activities and consequently may not be properly represented in the current database. Furthermore, this overview across all BNA centers throughout France fails to reflect the gradual phasing in of the system and the increasingly active participation of independent neurologists throughout the year. It is most likely that, as more and more CIMA from independent neurologists are included during the coming months, the BNA will increasingly reflect the particular characteristics of the service they provide. All these points explain that the sample presented here are only a limited subset of the overall population.

The BNA was devised and designed as a huge matrix where the CIMA variables interact with the various types of procedure performed within the centers. The requirement of confidentiality, achieved through data anonymization [18], and the impossibility of going backward in time, means that any data entry errors will remain embedded until the next consultation. Nevertheless, errors that become incorporated into the database may well remain and only the constant improvement of the database management and quality control will gradually be able to correct the first data entry errors.

In terms of quality control, the BNA coordinating team endeavors to trace the source of the data to

ensure that the information entered in the BNA does indeed correspond to that observed in the field and accurately reflects the consultation. The comprehensiveness and quality of the information supplied are the two key areas targeted by this continuing process of quality improvement carried out by the BNA team. For instance, we can notice that 0.2% (n=19) of patients with MCI have a MMSE score lower than 10. Centers need to be informed in order to control this type of incongruence. The quality control is a major and necessary step for a scientific epidemiological use of the BNA

AD and related disorders databases already exist in several countries. Although the BNA provides a minimum dataset in comparison with others containing biological [19], histological [20, 21], or clinical data [22, 23], its advantage is of course its size and statistical power. With the example of the French Hospital Database on HIV [24], the BNA is one of the rare national databases allowing the ongoing collection of socio-demographic, epidemiological, and clinical data on AD and related disorders. Participating centers benefit both from enhancing their national visibility and from being able to access information in each of the fields covered by data collection. The database explores three fields (medical, psychological, and social) and seeks to cover all aspects of care for patients with AD and related disorders. Analyses of the data can be used to prepare activity reports but can also lead to research hypotheses and improvements in patient care. The medical field is principally covered by clinical data (diagnosis, investigations, and treatments), the clinical psychology field is covered by the type of intervention and the neuropsychological scores (especially the MMSE), and the social field covers the patient's environment (entourage, housing, and resources).

Based on a computerized medical file focusing on the patient, the BNA, like the aforementioned database on HIV, should eventually provide to policy makers and to the others measures of the French Alzheimer Plan, longitudinal data for periodic or thematic analysis (estimate of active file population, follow-up studies, etc.). In so doing, it is possible to inform the discussion on what resources are required to best meet the needs of the population in each area and especially to scale the supply and delivery of specialized "memory" healthcare through each regional health organization scheme. As well as helping to inform policy decisions, these anonymized data should ultimately serve as a basis for reflection and the starting point to develop more specific studies involving independent cohorts.

By the end of 2012, in order to be more exhaustive, use of the BNA will be mandatory for keeping the label Memory consultation. A descriptive analysis will be carried out periodically to review the progress of the National Alzheimer Database and further develop this nationwide data collection system.

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