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An Integrated View of the Hidden Costs of Iron Deficiency Anemia: Beyond the Iron Pill

Sara Mohammadian[1,2,5], Mohammad Hossein Delshad[*3,4,5]

[1.] Department of Public Health, School of Health, Torbat Heydariyeh University of Medical Sciences, Torbat Heydariyeh, Iran.
[2.] Medical Student, Students Research Committee, Torbat Heydariyeh University of Medical Sciences, Torbat Heydariyeh, Iran.
[3.] Department of Public Health, School of Health, Torbat Heydariyeh University of Medical Sciences, Torbat Heydariyeh, Iran.
[4.] Health Sciences Research Center, Torbat Heydariyeh University of Medical Sciences, Torbat Heydariyeh, Iran.
[5.] Social Determinants of Health Research Center, Torbat Heydariyeh University of Medical Sciences, Torbat Heydariyeh, Iran.
Corresponding author: Mohammad Hossein Delshad Delshadmh1@thums.ac.ir
No 15, Torbat Heydariyeh University of Medical Sciences, Vice Chancellor for Education, Research and Technology Mehr Blvd., Ferdowsi Blvd., Valieasr Twn, Torbat Heydariyeh, Iran.
† P.O. Box 9516160061; Tel: +98 (51) 52226013; Fax: Tel: +98 (51) 52228021.

ABSTRACT. Iron deficiency anaemia (IDA) is a widespread worldwide health problem, with women suffering disproportionately. Its effects go beyond fatigue, including severe impaired postural control and increased risk of falls. Results from a recent study by Harrabi and colleagues. are examined in this editorial. They examine the complex mechanisms behind these disturbances of balance and conclude that they are caused by simultaneous deficits in the neurocognitive (due to low ferritin) and physical-muscular (due to low haemoglobin) systems. According to the article, traditional treatment using iron supplements alone is not sufficient to restore full function, because it ignores persistent deficits in proprioception, muscle function, and cognitive fatigue. This paper therefore advocates a paradigm shift towards an integrated, multi-component therapeutic approach combining targeted physical and cognitive rehabilitation with traditional supplementation. The main conclusion is that to effectively improve patient safety and quality of life, the IDA should be managed holistically, considering it as a complex systemic disease rather than a haematological disorder.

Keywords: Risk assessment, ergonomics, human factors, drowsiness, and occupational fatigue.

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Introduction

Almost 25 percent of the world's population suffers from iron deficiency anaemia (IDA), a silent global epidemic Harrabi et al. (n.d.) Women of childbearing potential are particularly affected and this has a major negative impact on their health and well-being Harrabi et al. (n.d.) However, the effects of IDA go far beyond the commonly recognised symptoms of weakness and fatigue Harrabi et al. (n.d.) One of the most important but often overlooked consequences is impaired postural control, which significantly increases the risk of falls and subsequent injuries Harrabi et al. (n.d.) Although there is evidence of a link between IDA and balancing problems, the precise mechanisms underlying this relationship are largely unknown (Harrabi et al.). (d.n.)

A major new study from Harrabi and colleagues This is an important step forward in the understanding of these complex mechanisms (n.d.). This cross-sectional study evaluated the performance of attention, muscle performance, fatigue and proprioception in a population of 40 women with IDA (Harrabi et al., n.d.). The main conclusions of this study are that postural deficits in these patients are not a direct consequence of low haemoglobin but are the result of two parallel and interacting pathways (Harrabi et al., n.d.).

The first is the muscular pathway, where low haemoglobin levels cause muscle oxygenation to be insufficient, increasing physical fatigue and impairing muscle function Harrabi et al. (n.d.) The second is the neurocognitive pathway, where iron deficiency, as reflected in low serum ferritin, interferes with important neurological processes such as myelination and neurotransmitter synthesis (Harrabi et al.). (d.n.).

Maintaining a stable position is dependent on proprioceptive acuity, alertness and mental fatigue, which are all exacerbated by these neurological changes Harrabi et al. (n.d.) These results are a serious challenge to traditional treatment strategies for IDA Harrabi et al. (n.d.) The primary objective of standard treatment protocols is to use iron supplementation to correct biochemical parameters Harrabi et al. (n.d.) Although critical, the Harrabi et al. research is not conclusive. (n.d.) means that this strategy may not be sufficient to achieve full functional rehabilitation. Even if the patient no longer meets the criteria for anaemia in blood tests, residual functional deficits such as cognitive fatigue, poor proprioception and muscle weakness may still occur (Harrabi et al.). (d.n.)

Therefore, a paradigm shift from one-dimensional, biochemically-oriented treatment to a multi-component, integrated model of treatment is justified Harrabi et al. (n.d.) There is strong evidence that physical interventions such as targeted exercises to increase strength, endurance and proprioception should be part of comprehensive treatment plans Harrabi et al. (n.d.) In addition, by addressing known attentional deficits, the inclusion of cognitive exercises can help to reduce the risk of falls (Harrabi et al.). (d.n.).

Additionally, this study shows distinct directions for further research (Harrabi et al. n. d.). High-quality randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are now desperately needed to assess the effectiveness of these combined interventions from a scientific standpoint (Harrabi et al. n. d.). At the same time, using neuroimaging methods such as fMRI and EEG may offer more profound understanding of the neural abnormalities and adaptations linked to IDA (Harrabi et al. n. d.).

Finally, the research carried out by Harrabi and colleagues. (n.d.) serves as a powerful reminder that iron-deficiency anaemia is a complex systemic disease with major functional consequences and not only a haematological disorder. Going beyond pills and treating the full range of muscle and neurocognitive impairment is essential to effective treatment. The secret to reducing the hidden costs of this silent epidemic and really improving the lives of millions of women around the world is to take an integrated, multidisciplinary approach (Harrabi et al.). (d.n.)

References

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