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Recognizing paediatric brain tumours in the emergency department

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Background: There are significant delays in making a timely diagnosis of brain tumours in children, with a 'time-to-diagnosis' of more than three months being reported (1). This study aims to identify if physicians are aware of 'red flag' signs and symptoms for brain tumours in various paediatric age groups, necessitating further investigation.

Materials and Methods: A questionnaire was distributed to clinicians from various specialties in a teaching hospital in the UK, who were involved in early and late management of children with suspected brain tumour. Data was collected prospectively and entered onto an Excel © spreadsheet for analysis.

Results: A total of 60 questionnaires were returned from a variety of clinicians including Paediatricians and Emergency Physicians.

Signs and symptoms that were considered to be highly associated with brain tumours in a 2-year old child were (Number/%):

Signs & Symptoms	Numbers	Percentage
New Visual disturbances	51	84.97%
New onset of abnormal gait	50	83.34%
Headaches upon awakening	48	80%
New onset seizures	45	75%
Increased Head size	42	70%
Behavioural changes	38	63.3%

Signs and symptoms that were considered to be highly associated with brain tumours in children aged 2-10 years were (Number/%):

Signs & Symptoms	Numbers	Percentage
Cranial Nerve palsies	53	88.4%
Reduced level of consciousness	53	88.4%
New onset of abnormal gait	50	83.3%
New onset seizures	49	81.7%
Headaches upon awakening	48	80%
Endocrine abnormalities	41	68.3%