

# Teaching of Functional Neurological Disorders (FND) across all UK medical schools

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## Introduction

Functional Neurological Disorders (FND) are commonly seen across medicine and surgery and most cases are seen by non-specialists. The need for better teaching is clear, with nearly 90% of trainees even in relevant specialities reporting that they had not been sufficiently trained in FND<sup>1</sup>.

It is unknown how much specific FND teaching UK medical students have.

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) has comparable incidence, global prevalence and disability to FND and so can provide a useful comparator condition<sup>2,3</sup>.



Figure 1: The Queen Square Institute of Neurology where this project was performed

## Aims:

Our research group set out to determine how many UK medical schools included FND on their curricula.

-Multiple sclerosis (MS) was used as a comparator condition to control for other factors such as overall limited curricula details on specific medical conditions.

-We set out to review each medical school website for evidence that FND and/or MS were specifically taught.

-We also set out to directly request this information from each medical school whether or not they had mentioned these conditions on their websites.

-We hypothesised that some views of the relative importance these illnesses might be associated with less FND involvement on medical school curricula than MS.

## Methods

- 1) Our research team first obtained a full list of current UK medical schools from the Medical Schools' Council: <https://www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/medical-schools>.
- 2) UCL Ethics was consulted, and we were informed that no ethical approval would be needed for this study.
- 3) The research team then searched every medical school website for any of the following terms: 'Functional' Functional Neurological disorder' Functional Neurological symptoms disorder'; 'Conversion syndrome'; 'Dissociative Neurological Symptoms disorder' and 'multiple sclerosis.'
- 4) The research team then located a contact email for each medical school from their website.
- 5) An individualised email was sent to each medical school asking if they included specific teaching on either or both of: functional neurological disorders and/or multiple sclerosis. It was made clear that this would be for a presentation at the British Neuropsychiatry Association Conference and that no individual medical schools would be identified. A follow up email was sent if there was no reply after 3 weeks.
- 6) If neither MS nor FND was referred to on the medical school websites, these results were not included.

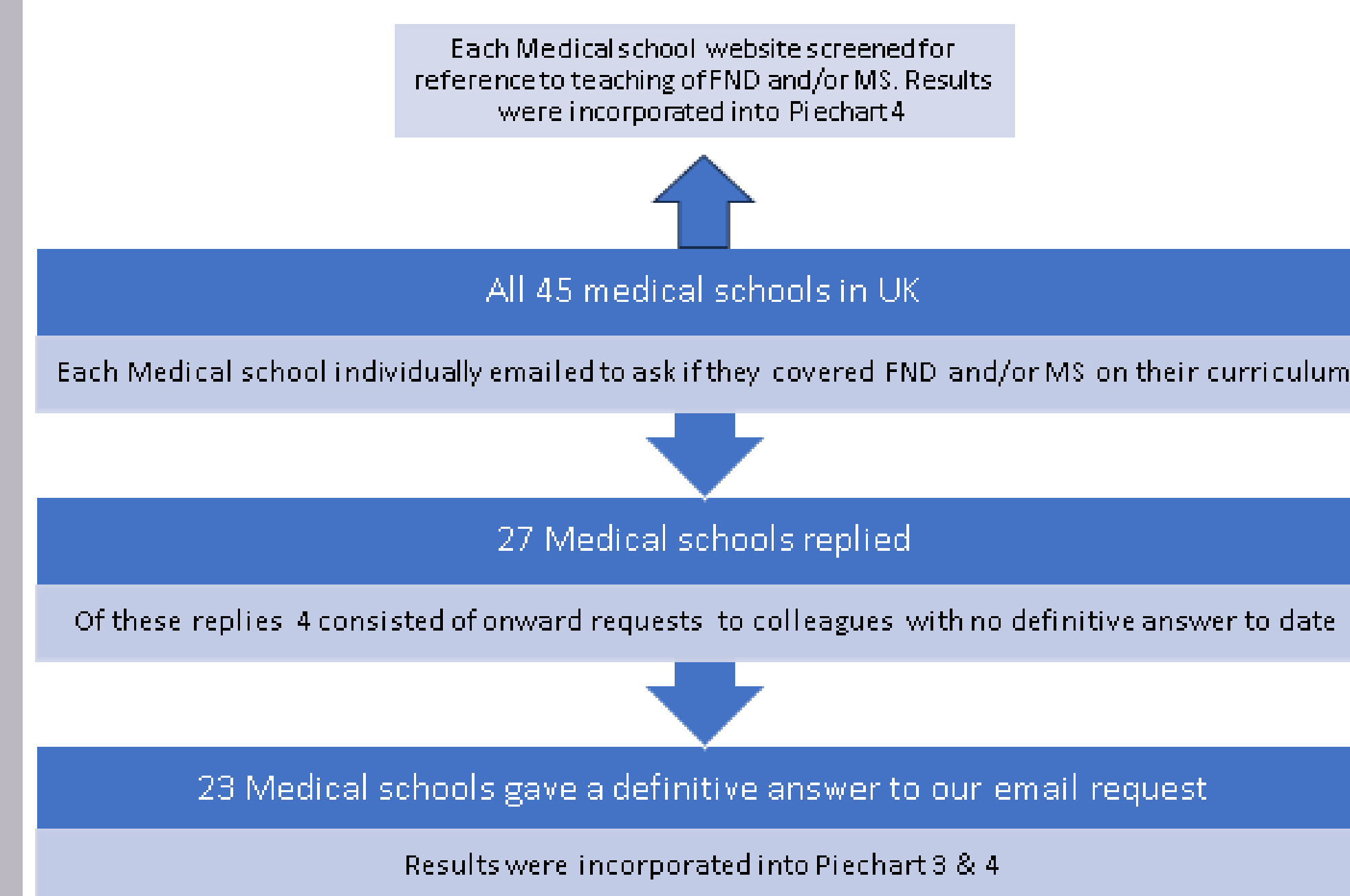
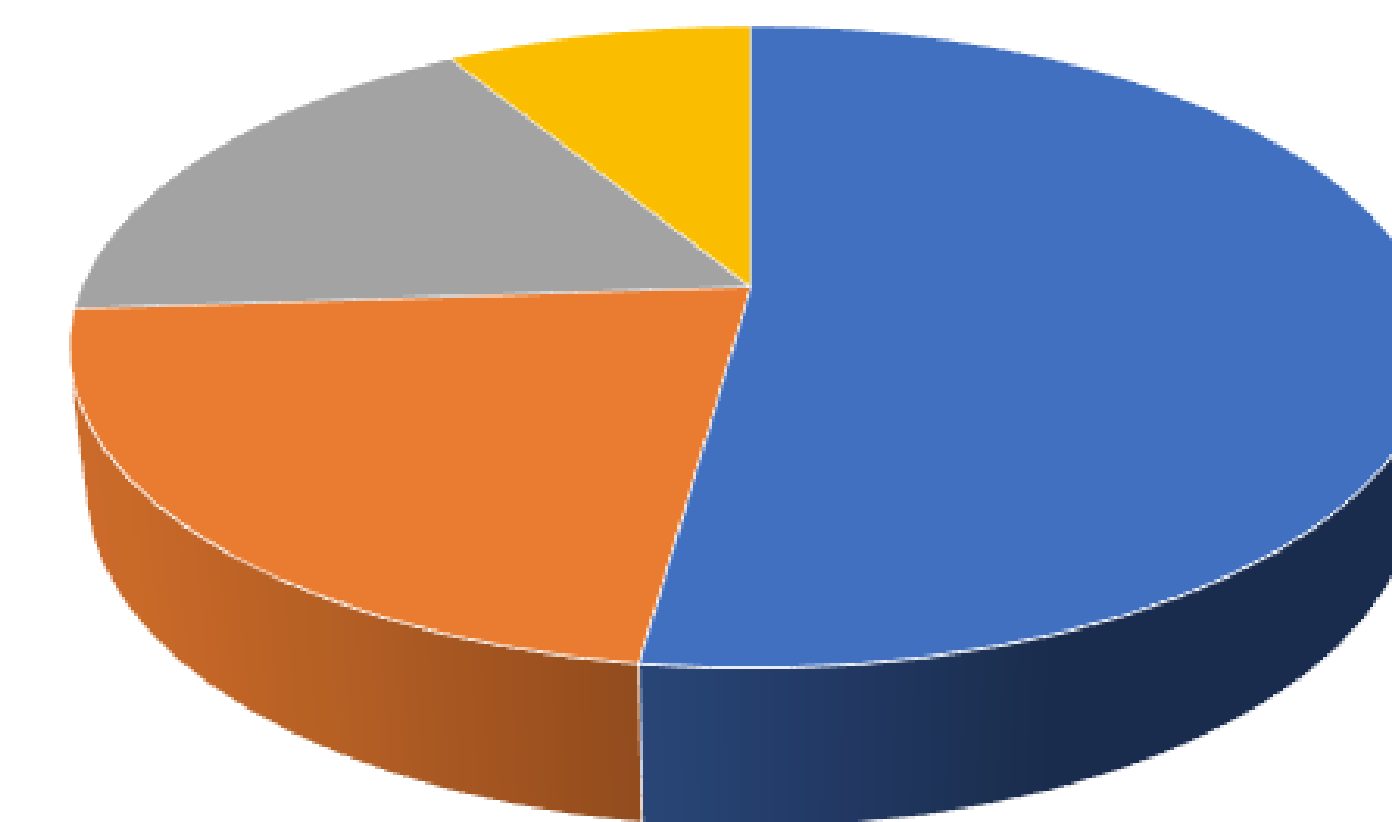


Figure 2: Flow diagram of the study

## Results

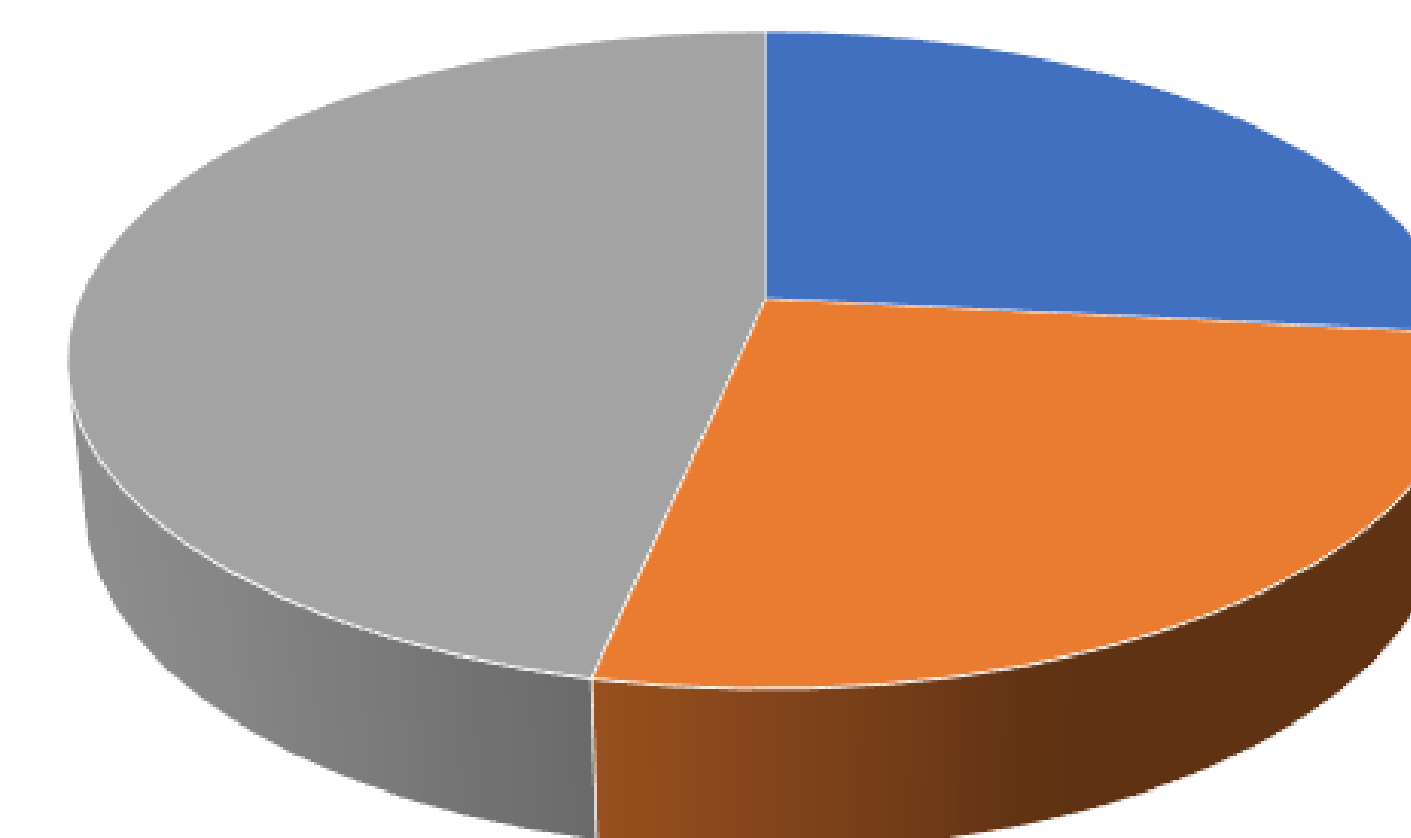
Medical schools making definitive replies (n=23)



- Dedicated teaching on both MS and FND: Total = 12
- Dedicated teaching on MS only: Total = 5
- Advised us to apply to Medical Schools' Council: Total = 4
- Unable to comment as currently undergoing significant curriculum development: Total = 2

Figure 3: Breakdown of medical school definitive responses

All UK Medical schools (n=45) highlighting those that showed specific information on MS and/or FND obtained either through website or email responses



- Specific reference to both MS and FND: Total = 12
- Specific reference to only MS: Total = 12
- No specific reference seen to date for either MS or FND: Total = 21

Figure 4: Overall combined results of our study

## Discussion

Our study shows evidence of specific teaching for FND and/or MS in at least the small majority of UK medical schools. Evidence of specific MS teaching was twice as common as specific teaching for FND, despite comparable incidences and disability.

Our work provides further impetus to improve FND education as most FND patients will be seen by non-specialists in the field.

Our study did have some limitations, most notably in terms of response rates from medical schools, and some may have covered FND indirectly. However, as our results represented the majority of medical schools in the UK, we feel they are of relevance. It is possible that future studies performed through the Medical Schools' Council might yield higher responses, although this is not certain, and this approach might introduce barriers too.

## Conclusion

Our study provides the first evidence of the scale of FND teaching at UK medical schools that we are aware of.

We found twice as many medical schools showed evidence of specific teaching for MS than for FND.

Our findings also suggest some challenges in ascertaining details of the curricula of different medical schools either by request or by use of their websites.

We hope that our findings will encourage additional education of FND at medical schools.

We are grateful to the many medical schools who responded to our study.  
Email: t.young@ucl.ac.uk (Prof Tim Young)

## References:

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- 3) Carson A, Stone J, Hibberd C, et al. Disability, distress and unemployment in neurology outpatients with symptoms 'unexplained by organic disease'. *J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry* 2011;82:810–3.