Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy (CIDP) is uncommon but important. It can be disabling but is usually treatable, and probably underdiagnosed. The only population-based studies suggest a prevalence of one or two per 100 000 but these are probably underestimates because of lack of referral or recognition of cases (Lunn et al. 1999; McLeod et al. 1999). In our population-based study of 46 patients in the south-east of England, 13% required an aid to walk and 54% were receiving medical treatment on the prevalence date (Lunn et al. 1999). The natural history of untreated disease is not known but two old large series included 7–35% of patients who eventually became bedridden or died from their disease (Dyck et al. 1975; Prineas & McLeod 1976). In a more recent large series, improvement with treatment was only partial, relapses were frequent, and 60% of patients were left with disability or continued to need treatment (Barohn et al. 1989).

**HISTORY**

The concept of CIDP emerged gradually from descriptions of recurrent attacks of steroid responsive demyelinating neuropathy (Austin 1958), was distinguished from the Guillain–Barré syndrome (GBS) (Thomas et al. 1969), and then described in increasingly large series (Dyck et al. 1975; Prineas & McLeod 1976). Thomas and colleagues pointed out the resemblance of the inflammatory demyelinating lesions in the peripheral nerves to those in chronic experimental autoimmune neuritis (Thomas et al. 1969).

**CLINICAL PATTERNS**

The typical clinical picture is of a chronic, more or less symmetrical, sensory and motor neuropathy with absent tendon reflexes.
There are several variants (Table 1). About 85% of patients have sensory symptoms, and purely sensory symptoms occur in 6% (McCombe et al. 1987; Oh et al. 1992). Most patients have motor symptoms and predominantly motor symptoms occur in 22% (McCombe et al. 1987). A pure motor form, multifocal motor neuropathy with conduction block (MMN) (Nobile-Orazio 2001), shows differences in its response to treatment and may be a different entity. A multifocal form with sensory and motor involvement was described by Lewis and Sumner and has now been labelled multifocal acquired demyelinating sensory and motor neuropathy (MADSAM) (Lewis et al. 1982; Saperstein et al. 2000). The proportion of patients falling into these various groups is not known, but in my own experience symmetrical forms of the disease are the most common and MMN and MADSAM each represent about one tenth of patients.

In the typical form of the disease, weakness is usually both proximal and distal, especially in the lower limbs, perhaps because of root involvement. Sensory involvement is usually less marked than motor and affects large more than small fibres. The respiratory muscles are affected in 15%, bulbar muscles in 6–10%, facial muscles in 6–15% and the ocular motor nerves in 4% of cases in the three largest series (Dyck et al. 1975; McCombe et al. 1987; Barohn et al. 1989). The autonomic nervous system is not usually affected, in contrast with GBS. However, the condition is very variable and cranial nerve signs can be prominent and are occasionally presenting features. Sometimes the upper limbs are initially and preferentially affected. Disabling sensory loss may be more marked than weakness. Approximately 20% have painful paraesthesiae, which are sometimes severe. Approximately 3% of patients have a postural tremor, which may be disabling. With advancing disease, wasting occurs, due to superimposed axonal degeneration, and contractures may develop. Rare childhood onset patients have pes cavus and clawing of the toes, although such features would lead to consideration of the diagnosis of Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease. Peripheral nerve thickening may occur in CIDP but less often than in hereditary demyelinating neuropathies. Papilloedema occurs in 1–7% of patients, possibly due to the increased CSF protein.

**TIME COURSE**

The clinical course of CIDP may be progressive, or relapsing and remitting with each relapse developing slowly over several weeks or sometimes more abruptly as in GBS. In approximately 3% the onset attack is acute, very like GBS, but the patient later shows a relapsing course, which responds to steroids or intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIg) (Mori et al. 2002).

We do not really know where GBS ends and CIDP begins. About 10% of patients with GBS have a period of early worsening 2 to 8 weeks after being treated with IVIg (Kleyweg & van der Meché 1991). Most of these patients eventually improve without further relapses and the early worsening may be because the immunotherapy has taken the nadir out of what would have been a monophasic illness. Guillain–Barré syndrome was once defined as having a progressive phase lasting no more than 4 weeks (Asbury 1981). Then, in 1991, an expert committee cleverly insisted on a progressive phase for CIDP of more than 2 months [Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) AIDS Task Force 1991]. This left an uncommon but inconvenient group of patients with a progressive phase of 4–8 weeks, which we called subacute (Hughes et al. 1992).

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**Table 1** Chronic inflammatory demyelinating neuropathies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subacute (4–8 weeks progressive phase)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>subacute inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy (CIDP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronic (&gt;8 weeks progressive phase)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy (CIDP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multifocal motor neuropathy with conduction block (MMN)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multifocal acquired demyelinating sensory and motor neuropathy (MADSAM)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy needs to be considered in any patient with a relapsing neuropathy, any patient with a GBS-like illness and a prolonged onset phase, and in any patient with a chronic neuropathy.

### DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

The AAN committee required the presence of progressive or relapsing weakness of more than one limb attributable to radiculoneuropathy, exclusion of other causes, relatively normal CSF cell count and fulfillment of strict electrophysiological criteria for a probable diagnosis of CIDP (Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the American Academy of Neurology AIDS Task Force 1991). Definite diagnosis required nerve biopsy evidence of a demyelinating neuropathy. A practical simplification of these criteria is offered in Table 2. It is now appreciated that the AAN neuropsychological criteria were too strict and a recent modification (Table 3) promises to be more sensitive but still adequately specific (Nicolas et al. 2002).

### DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS

Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy needs to be considered in any patient with a relapsing neuropathy, any patient with a GBS-like illness and a prolonged onset phase, and in any patient with a chronic neuropathy. The diagnosis is most likely when there is areflexia, proximal as well as distal motor involvement and greater motor than sensory deficit. The presence of a general medical condition,

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### Table 2 Diagnostic criteria after the Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the American Academy of Neurology AIDS Task Force 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Progressive or relapsing motor and sensory (rarely only motor or sensory) dysfunction of the limbs developing over at least 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced or absent tendon reflexes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No alternative cause, e.g. relevant toxin exposure, family history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No CNS involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Neurophysiological studies indicating the presence of multifocal demyelination

- **CSF**
  - Cell count < 10/mm³ or > 10/mm³ if HIV positive (protein concentration usually increased, often > 1000 mg/L)

- **Nerve biopsy**
  - Unequivocal evidence of demyelination or remyelination (inflammation, onion bulb formation, variation between fascicles)


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### Table 3 Neurophysiological criteria after Nicolas et al. 2002

The nerve conduction studies must show one of the following abnormalities in at least three different nerves.

- Conduction block* or temporal dispersion† in at least three different nerves and abnormal conduction values suggestive of demyelination in at least one nerve
- Conduction block or temporal dispersion in at least two different nerves and abnormal conduction values suggestive of demyelination in at least one other nerve
- Conduction block or temporal dispersion in one nerve and abnormal conduction values suggestive of demyelination in at least two other nerves
- Abnormal conduction values in three nerves

Criteria for abnormal conduction indicating demyelination include:

- Maximum motor nerve conduction velocity < 80% of the lower limit of normal if the compound muscle action potential is > 80% of the lower limit of normal and maximum motor nerve conduction velocity < 70% of the lower limit of normal if it is not.

*Conduction block is an amplitude drop of 30% between proximal and distal sites (neuropathologists argue about this figure which ranges from 20 to 50% by different criteria: the figure is less reliable when the amplitude is small).

†Temporal dispersion is a prolongation of the compound muscle action potential by more than 15%.

For more details consult the original publication or your neurophysiologist who is in the best position to diagnose CIDP.
can be induced by T cell responses to any of the peripheral nerve disease. Experimental autoimmune neuritis, which it resembles, converted into useful diagnostic tests. Attempts to

[

Table 4: Differential diagnosis of chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syndrome/Condition</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guillain–Barré syndrome</td>
<td>Subacute inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multifocal motor neuropathy with conduction block</td>
<td>Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease type 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease type 3 (Dejerine–Sottas syndrome)</td>
<td>Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease type X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hereditary liability to pressure palsies</td>
<td>Other genetic causes, e.g. Refsum’s disease, metachromatic leukodystrophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraproteinaemic demyelinating neuropathy</td>
<td>Solitary plasmacytoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osteosclerotic myeloma</td>
<td>Waldenstrom’s macroglobulinaemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance:</td>
<td>IgM paraproteinaemia with antibodies to Myelin Associated Glycoprotein (MAG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IgM paraproteinaemia without antibodies to MAG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IgG paraproteinaemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IgA paraproteinaemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some toxin/drug-induced neuropathies (hexacarbons, amiodarone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic relapsing axonal neuropathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

such as carcinoma, plasma cell dyscrasia, diabetes mellitus or systemic lupus erythematosus, does not preclude a diagnosis of CIDP because all these may be associated or possibly causative illnesses. Fortunately, once the nerve conduction tests have identified a demyelinating rather than an axonal neuropathy, the differential diagnosis becomes much more limited (Table 4).

### PATHOGENESIS

Although CIDP occurs at any age, it is more common in the middle aged and elderly. It is uncommon in children but has been reported as young as 2 years of age. All reported series have included more men than women, an unusual sex ratio for an autoimmune disease but the same as in GBS. Nevertheless the inflammatory features at foci of active disease, and response to immunotherapy, have led to the general acceptance that CIDP is an autoimmune disease. Experimental autoimmune neuritis, which it resembles, can be induced by T cell responses to any of the peripheral nerve myelin proteins P0, P2 or PMP22 (Adam et al. 1989; Hughes et al. 1999). Recently antibody responses to PMP22 have been found in 49% of patients with CIDP (Gabriel et al. 2000) and to P0 in 28% (Yan et al. 2001) but these reports have not been confirmed or converted into useful diagnostic tests. Attempts to find antibodies to gangliosides or other peripheral nerve antigens have been unrewarding. In multifocal motor neuropathy with conduction block, antibodies to ganglioside GM1 are present in 30–80% of cases but their role in pathogenesis of that condition is unproved (Nobile-Orazio 2001). Antibodies to gangliosides and other glycoconjugates are present in 10% or less of patients with CIDP (Meléndez-Vásquez et al. 1997).

There is not the same relationship between infection and onset or relapse that is seen in GBS. Only one quarter of our series of 40 patients reported an infection preceding the onset of their illness and it is unusual for relapses to have a clear relationship to infection (Meléndez-Vásquez et al. 1997). In one case of recurrent GBS, recurrences were preceded by cytomegalovirus exposures and higher titres of antibodies to cytomegalovirus were found in 39 CIDP patients than in 25 controls (Donaghy et al. 1989; McCombe et al. 1987; McLeod et al. 1999). However, we did not find IgM antibodies to cytomegalovirus in any of our 40 patients (Meléndez-Vásquez et al. 1997).

### INVESTIGATION

See Table 5. There is no diagnostic test that clinches the diagnosis of CIDP. Neurophysiology is the most important investigation, distinguishing axonal from demyelinating neuropathies (Figure 1), and showing a multifocal process rather than the diffuse demyelination characteristic of the hereditary demyelinating neuropathies.

It is customary to send off a battery of blood investigations, which are more useful as a baseline for future treatment and reassuring the faint-hearted than likely to detect a cause. Searching for a paraprotein is important because serum protein electrophoresis reveals a paraprotein in about 10% of cases (Kelly et al.

### Table 5: Investigation of demyelinating neuropathy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Type</th>
<th>Test Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blood tests</td>
<td>Full blood picture, ESR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Renal, liver and thyroid profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fasting glucose, glycosylated haemoglobin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serum protein electrophoresis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serum immunoglobulin levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urine</td>
<td>Glucose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bence-Jones protein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSF</td>
<td>Cells, protein, immunoglobulin oligoclonal bands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunology</td>
<td>Anti-HIV antibodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antiganglioside antibodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antimyelin associated glycoprotein antibodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiology</td>
<td>Chest X-ray</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skeletal survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Molecular genetic tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peripheral myelin protein 22 gene duplication or deletion</td>
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</table>
The DNA test for the most common cause of Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, duplication of the peripheral myelin protein 22 gene, occasionally turns up an unexpected case. Immunological tests have been disappointing but searching for antibodies to ganglioside GM1 is part of the ritual.

The CSF is useful because an increased protein concentration is found in almost every case (Barohn et al. 1989; Dyck et al. 1975). The value is often more than 1000 mg/L and the cell count is normal or nearly normal. As an exception, in CIDP associated with HIV the cell count is commonly raised.

Nerve biopsy is often unhelpful in the diagnosis of CIDP (Molenaar et al. 1998) because the sural nerve, which is the one usually biopsied, is a distal sensory nerve and the brunt of the pathology falls on the motor fibres, nerve roots and proximal nerve trunks (Krendel et al. 1989; Bouchard et al. 1999). The most common abnormalities are loss of axons and ongoing axonal degeneration, which are probably the consequence of proximal inflammatory foci. Epineurial lymphocytic infiltration is quite common but nonspecific and therefore unhelpful. The most specific diagnostic features are endoneurial lymphocytic infiltration and remyelinated, demyelinated or demyelinating nerve fibres, but these are only found in about one quarter of patients (Figure 2). Onion bulbs occur in about one tenth of patients and are the consequence of repeated episodes of de- and re-myelination (Figure 3). They are usually sparse and much less abundant than in Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease Type 1a. With increasing experience I have veered towards avoiding nerve biopsy except when the diagnosis is in doubt.

**Figure 1** This diagram has been reproduced with permission from the BMJ. It was kindly provided by Professor Kerry Mills, and shows the compound muscle action potentials elicited from a muscle such as the abductor pollicis brevis following distal (upper) and proximal (lower of each pair of traces) stimulation.

In the normal nerve the distal motor latency is short and nerve conduction velocity rapid (>50 m/s).

In demyelinating neuropathy the distal motor latency is prolonged and nerve conduction velocity markedly slowed to less than 80% of normal. The proximally evoked action potential is reduced in amplitude. The reduction in amplitude may be due partly to conduction block of some nerve fibres and partly to dispersion of the arrival of the individual nerve fibre action potentials at the motor end plate. Nerve conduction velocity is usually uniformly slowed in Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease type 1. Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy usually shows multifocal abnormalities with partial conduction block.

In axonal neuropathy the compound muscle action potential is also reduced but the distal motor latency and nerve conduction velocities are relatively preserved.

**Figure 2** Transverse frozen section of sural nerve from a patient with CIDP showing a cluster of T cells identified in the endoneurium with an immunoperoxidase labelled monoclonal antibody. Such a finding is highly specific but not very sensitive for the diagnosis.
IMMUNOTHERAPY

Steroids
Because of the inflammatory and presumed autoimmune nature of CIDP, steroids should be beneficial. This expectation is borne out by the experience of experts in the field and the conclusions of the only randomised trial (Dyck et al. 1982). However, the significance of the beneficial result reported in that trial was lost when the results were re-analysed according to the intention-to-treat principle and with pessimistic imputations about the fate of the patients who were lost to follow-up (Mehndiratta & Hughes 2001). Nevertheless, the overwhelming conclusion from case series and non-systematic reviews is that steroids are beneficial and it is probably inappropriate and unethical to consider further trials comparing steroids with placebo. The serious adverse effects of steroid treatment, including obesity, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, osteoporosis and cataracts, have led to continuing searches for alternative treatments.

In the absence of evidence to guide dosage, my practice is to start oral prednisolone 1.5 mg/kg (maximum 120 mg) on alternate days. Bisphosphonate prophylaxis for osteoporosis must be started at the same time because the process of steroid-induced bone resorption begins immediately. The risks of hyperkalaemia,
hyperglycaemia and hypertension merit appropriate monitoring. Subsequent dosage depends on the response. I try to hold this initial dose for at least 2 and if possible 4 weeks. Once there is an adequate response I reduce the dose by 10 mg every 2 weeks, down to 40 mg on alternate days, then by 5 mg on alternate days every 2 weeks down to 20 mg, then by 2.5 mg on alternate days every 2 weeks until as low a dose as possible has been achieved. Most patients require a dose in the region of 10–25 mg on alternate days to maintain remission. This regimen is based on the protocols reported by others and personal experience. Good evidence to confirm the hypothesis that alternate day dosing reduces adrenopituitary axis suppression and the proposal that it does not cause steroid myopathy would be welcome.

**Intravenous immunoglobulin**

Vermeulen et al. showed that first plasma and then intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIg) infusion appeared to benefit patients with CIDP (Vermeulen et al. 1985). This observation has been confirmed in three randomised trials (Hahn et al. 1996b; Thompson et al. 1996; Mendell et al. 2001) but not in a fourth (Vermeulen et al. 1993). The evidence from these trials has been summarized in a meta-analysis, which concluded that with IVIg the likelihood of improvement after three or four weeks was 2.47 times greater (95% confidence interval 1.02–6.01) than with placebo (Van Schaik et al. 2002). Unfortunately the treatment effect commonly lasts only 4 weeks and seldom more than 12, so that treatment, which costs about £2500 (and rising) for a standard 2.0 g/kg course, has to be repeated.

A further trial did not find a significant difference between the short-term effects of IVIg and PE (Dyck et al. 1994). Finally, our own trial did not detect any significant difference between the short-term benefits from IVIg and oral prednisolone (Hughes et al. 2001a).

Advice about the use of IVIg is available in a recent article in *Practical Neurology* (Pritchard & Hughes 2001).

**Choice of initial treatment**

In my recent review I concluded that the comparative trials were short-term, which is inconvenient and eventually gives rise to difficulties with venous access.

**Plasma exchange**

Two small but high quality trials both showed benefit from plasma exchange (PE). Dyck and colleagues at the Mayo clinic undertook a double blind trial in 29 patients comparing twice weekly PE or sham exchange for three weeks. They showed significantly greater improvement in clinical impairments and motor nerve conduction (Dyck et al. 1986). Hahn and colleagues in London, Ontario, undertook a crossover trial comparing PE with sham exchange in 18 treatment-naïve patients of whom 16 completed the crossover period. Patients received four exchanges in the first week, three in the second, two in the third and one in the fourth. There were significant improvements in impairment, disability, grip strength and proximal compound muscle action potential amplitude with PE that were not seen with sham exchange (Hahn et al. 1996a). A Cochrane review is in progress and is likely to conclude that PE produces short-term improvement (Mehndiratta 2001, pers. comm.). In order to maintain improvement, PE has to be repeated at variable intervals, but often as little as 4 weeks, with IVIg the likelihood of improvement after three or four weeks was 2.47 times greater (95% confidence interval 1.02–6.01) than with placebo.
Both pure motor CIDP and MMN may be made worse by steroids, which should be avoided usually only considered as a third option’ (Hughes 2002).

In patients with pure motor CIDP, steroids may cause worsening and IVIg is more likely to be effective (see below).

**Immunosuppressive drugs**

Because of the disadvantages of steroids, IVIg and PE, cytotoxic drugs and immunomodulatory treatments have been tried (van den Bergh 2001). One small trial failed to show benefit from azathioprine (Dyck et al. 1985) and another from beta interferon (Hadden et al. 1999). However these trials were too small or too short to conclude that these agents are ineffective. There have only been anecdotal reports or small series describing benefit with cyclophosphamide, cyclosporin and mycophenolate but no randomised trials (Hughes et al. 2001b). Despite the absence of evidence, immunosuppressive drugs are often used in treatment-resistant cases. The most common is probably azathioprine but the better safety profile of methotrexate in rheumatoid arthritis and dermatomyositis suggests that this be considered as an alternative. Oral or intravenous cyclophosphamide and cyclosporin each have their protagonists. There is a need for trials to determine whether any of these treatments are beneficial. In the meantime I recommend adding azathioprine for severely affected patients who respond inadequately to the primary treatments, prednisolone, IVIg or PE. To reduce the 10% risk of adverse effects and intolerance, I measure the thiopurine methyl transferase enzyme level in the blood before starting the drug and then gradually increase the dose to 2.5 mg/kg, but more slowly and to half this dose or less if the enzyme levels are low.

**SPECIAL SITUATIONS**

**Pure motor CIDP and MMN**

Both pure motor CIDP and MMN may be made worse by steroids, which should be avoided (Donaghy et al. 1994; Umamathi et al. 2002). Plasma exchange is also unlikely to help. By contrast, IVIg is often dramatically and rapidly effective, experience that is supported by three small trials (Van den Berg et al. 1995; Federico et al. 2000; Léger et al. 2000). Unfortunately the improvement is short-lived and not invariable and disability progresses slowly despite repeated treatment. Many different immunosuppressive drugs, principally cyclophosphamide, have been tried but the Cochrane review did not identify any randomised trials. The evidence from non-randomised studies is inadequate to conclude whether any particular immunosuppressive agent is effective (Umamathi et al. 2002).

**Paraproteinaemic demyelinating neuropathy**

The peripheral neuropathy associated with a paraprotein may resemble the different forms of CIDP and respond to the same treatments. However, the management of these patients has been reviewed elsewhere and involves special considerations beyond the scope of this review (Hughes 2002).

**GENERAL TREATMENTS**

Because immunotherapy takes time to work and is often only partially effective, measures to deal with the symptoms of CIDP are also needed. Amitriptyline, gabapentin and carbamazepine are all worth trying for neuropathic pain. A physiotherapist will help with gait and balance retraining and is the best person to supervise judicious use of foot drop splints, sticks, crutches.
or frames. Dealing with the fatigue and other consequences of a chronic, disabling and unpredictable disease may be aided by the excellent support provided by the CIDP network of the GBS Support Group (see patient information below)

CONCLUSIONS
Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathies are a set of progressive or relapsing, often disabling diseases that are potentially treatable.

Although progress has been made in defining some effective treatments, patients are often left with significant disability and existing treatments can have unacceptable adverse effects.

More research is needed to investigate the possible benefits of existing treatments, especially immunosuppressive agents, and to identify new less toxic regimens.

We also need to use the strategies of the Cochrane Collaboration to synthesize what evidence there is from randomised trials as the basis for treatment guidelines.

PATIENT INFORMATION
• Peripheral Neuropathy Trust (www.neuropathy-trust.org). Information about all forms of neuropathy, especially chronic idiopathic axonal neuropathy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This article is based on the Cochrane systematic reviews that have been quoted and on my contribution to the Festschrift for Professor PK Thomas (Hughes 2002).

REFERENCES
Hughes RAC (2002) Systematic reviews of treatment for


