

The “Hallett Sign” of Functional Jerky Movement Disorder

Jon Stone, MB ChB, PhD,^{1*} Anthony E. Lang, MD, FRCPC,^{2,3,4} Joseph Jankovic, MD,⁵ Michele Tinazzi, MD, PhD,⁶ Barbara A. Dworetzky, MD,⁷ Alan Carson, MB ChB, MD,¹ and Marina A.J. Tijssen, MD, PhD⁸

Mark Hallett (1943–2025), a giant in the fields of movement disorders and functional neurological disorder (FND), will be sadly missed by a global research community. We wish to note a physical sign of functional movement disorder, which we believe Mark first described and which we propose be named the “Hallett sign.”

Mark noted in 2010 that some individuals with a jerky or hyperkinetic functional movement disorder have an anticipatory jerk in expectation of tendon reflex testing, even when the hammer does not make contact with their limb.

“Another clue that reflex myoclonus would be psychogenic is when the reflex occurs even though the tendon hammer is stopped just short of the tendon (without hitting it) – just the visual stimulus might provoke the psychogenic movement.”¹

Mark published a video of himself (“Myoclonus 12”) (Video 1) carrying out this maneuver as part of a multi-author book² and conference on functional movement disorder held in 2009, which he often used when teaching.

Anticipatory jerks like this have not been formally studied, but are identical to other stimulus-sensitive jerky forms of functional movement disorder, originally called psychogenic myoclonus.³ They typically have a long and variable latency (as compared with a short latency in cortical and other “non-functional” myoclonus), as well as a long duration of muscle contraction.⁴



Video 1. Mark Hallett demonstrating anticipatory jerky movements in an individual with a functional movement disorder. Reproduced with permission from Hallett et al.² Video content can be viewed at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mds.70213>

These are features also shared by “voluntary” jerky movements.

The Hallett sign embodies questions surrounding free will and volition, as well as the importance of clinical diagnosis, which marked Mark Hallett’s career in neurophysiology, movement disorders, and as the first president of the FND Society. ■

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¹Centre for Clinical Brain Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; ²Edmond J. Safra Program in Parkinson’s Disease, Morton and Gloria Shulman Movement Disorders Clinic, Toronto Western Hospital, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; ³Division of Neurology, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; ⁴Krembil Brain Institute, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; ⁵Parkinson’s Disease Center and Movement Disorders Clinic, Department of Neurology, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas, USA; ⁶Neurology Unit, Movement Disorders Division, Department of Neurosciences, Biomedicine and Movement Sciences, University of Verona, Verona, Italy; ⁷Department of Neurology, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, USA; ⁸Expertise Centre Movement Disorders Groningen Department of Neurology, University of Groningen, University Medical Centre Groningen (UMCG), Groningen, The Netherlands

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***Correspondence to:** Dr. Jon Stone, Department of Clinical Neurosciences, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh EH16 4SA, UK; E-mail: jon.stone@ed.ac.uk

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Supporting Data

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web-site.