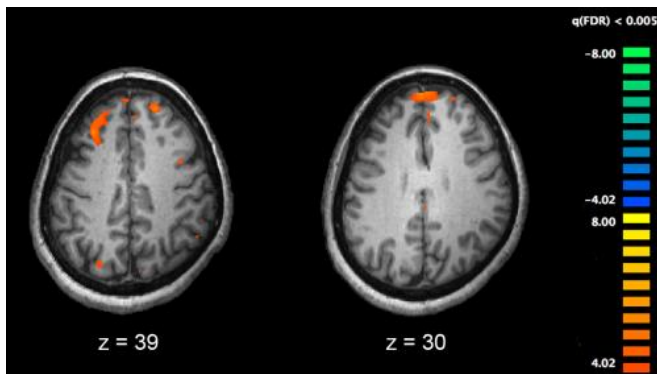


Twenty minute test determines attention and memory capacity in patients with schizophrenia

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Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and other brain imaging technologies allow for the study of differences in brain activity in people diagnosed with schizophrenia. The image shows two levels of the brain, with areas that were more active in healthy controls than in schizophrenia patients shown in orange, during an fMRI study of working memory. Credit: Kim J, Matthews NL, Park S./PLoS One.

Researchers from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and collaborators have designed a test that can determine the cognitive capacities of patients with schizophrenia. The test consists of a battery of assessments chosen by the researchers which permits them, in 20 minutes or less, to examine patients' short-term memory capacities, mental agility and also organisational capacities.

The research, which forms part of the [doctoral thesis](#) of Sílvia Zaragoza Domingo, is the result of a pioneering study lasting six months in which 257 professionals worked with a sample of 700 individuals representative of the population diagnosed with schizophrenia in Spain. The study identified a [battery](#) of four assessments in order to conduct the [test](#).

The battery of assessments is short, and consists of tests already available to doctors and psychologists. Moreover, the tests are available in several languages, which makes it easier to use them with [patients](#) of different origins. Another advantage is that they are easy to administer, and therefore facilitates use by health professionals to assess patients with schizophrenia. The test permits [health professionals](#) to assess, study and comment on symptoms of the disorder which are normally not taken into account, and which could serve to treat each case in the best possible manner.

"In schizophrenia, it is desirable for the patient to be as independent and functional as possible, although that does not always happen," explains Sílvia Zaragoza. She says, "This test allows each patient to better adapt to their life. For example, if a patient is slower mentally, but short-term memory is not affected, he or she will have more chances of leading an independent life than someone whose memory is also affected."

This battery of assessments represents a very important step toward offering specific examinations, which can be conducted through regular mental health centres or private centres. After an initial examination, the clinics can also conduct follow-ups of patients and confirm whether changes in medications worsen attention span or memory, a common complaint among patients at their routine visits.

The study was published in the journal *Schizophrenia Research: Cognition*.

More information: Silvia Zaragoza Domingo et al. EPICOG-SCH: A brief battery to screen cognitive impact of schizophrenia in stable outpatients, *Schizophrenia Research: Cognition*

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