ALS – Pat, Present, and Future

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ALS was first clearly characterized by Jean-Martin Charcot in 1874. Since then, a great deal has been learned about the clinical and pathological features of the disease. The present era has concentrated on finding drugs that might slow the progression of the disease, finding better ways to manage the disease and the mechanisms of motor neuronal death in ALS.

About 10% of cases of ALS are familial (fALS), and in 1993 the first gene mutation responsible for fALS was recognized, SOD1. Since then mutations of other genes responsible for fALS have been reported. Their mode of action in causing motor neuron death has provided a fertile field in the last 15 years. Search for predisposing genes for sporadic ALS (sALS) has been less successful. We still do not know the major cause(s) of sALS, but BMAA derived from ubiquitous cyanobacteria is a strong contender.

The future of ALS rests on finding the causes of what is clearly a syndrome and being able to treat and prevent the disease.

This presentation will discuss the people involved in each step of elucidating the disease and possible future treatments.