A Systematic Review of Pharmacologic and Rehabilitative Treatment of Small Fiber Neuropathies

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Received: 26 September 2020; Accepted: 25 November 2020; Published: 28 November 2020

Abstract: The aim of this systematic review is to guide the physician in defining the pharmacologic and rehabilitative therapeutic approaches for adopting the best strategies described in the current literature. The search was conducted in PubMed, EMBASE, Cochrane Library and Web of Science to identify the treatment of small fiber neuropathies. Two reviewers independently reviewed and came to a consensus on which articles met inclusion/exclusion criteria. The authors excluded the duplicates, animal studies and included the English articles in which the treatment of patients with small fiber neuropathies was described. The search identified a total of 975 articles with the keywords “small fiber neuropathy” AND “rehabilitation” OR “therapy” OR “treatment”. Seventy-eight selected full-text were analyzed by the reviewers. Forty-two publications met the inclusion criteria and were included in the systematic review to describe the rehabilitative and pharmacologic treatment of small fiber neuropathies. Despite the range of different protocols of treatment for small fiber neuropathy, other robust trials are needed. In addition, always different therapeutic approaches are used; a unique protocol could be important for the clinicians. More research is needed to build evidence for the best strategy and to delineate a definitive therapeutic protocol.

Keywords: small fiber neuropathy; treatment; systematic reviews

1. Introduction

Small Fiber Neuropathy

Small fiber neuropathy (SFN) is caused by the impairment of unmyelinated C and thinly myelinated Aδ fibers. The symptoms are characterized by sensory symptoms, pain and autonomic symptoms, such as palpitations, gastrointestinal disturbances, and orthostatic dizziness. Neuropathic symptoms have a negative impact on the quality of life [1]. The symptoms and signs can be present as spontaneous (e.g.,
burning, deep, itching and paroxysmal) or evoked (e.g., thermal allodynia, light tough allodynia and hyperalgesia) pain.

Our systematic review defined the different rehabilitative and pharmacological approaches for SFN and to guide the physician to delineate a therapeutic protocol adopting the best strategies described in the current literature. In addition, we analyzed all the therapeutic approaches we found in the current literature to realize a guide to provide a common language to the multidisciplinary team such as physiatrists, neurologists, physiotherapists, nurses and neuropsychologists that must treat this disorder. The current literature did not describe a unique therapeutic approach, use arbitrarily different therapies. A therapeutic protocol should make more objective, reproducible, repeatable the outcomes and could help the multidisciplinary team to manage the patients.

2. Methods

2.1. Search Strategy

The search was carried out on the following medical electronic databases: PubMed, EMBASE, Cochrane Library and Scopus, Web of Science. The reference list of the related articles was also used to search for other suitable documents. The review was conducted from 22 May 2020 to 1 July 2020.

2.2. Selection Criteria and Data Extraction

Studies considered for this review must include the therapeutic methods in patients with SFN. We included English original articles about the rehabilitation and the pharmacological approaches for the SFN. We excluded animal studies, participants with other neuropathies. We also excluded all of the remaining duplicates.

Two reviewers (C.R. and V.M.) independently screened the titles and abstracts from the initial search to identify relevant records and to identify eligible studies based on title and abstract. Selected full texts were then reviewed and included in the systematic review, following the PRISMA protocol [2] and in accordance with the PICOS (population, intervention, comparison, outcome, and study design) criteria [3] shown in Table 1: Participants were all patients affected by SFN; intervention was based on rehabilitation therapy or pharmacological approaches; the comparator was any comparator; the outcomes included clinical assessments, diagnostic scales, electromyography and nerve conduction, biopsy; and study design was randomized clinical trials (RCTs), case series and case report, retrospective studies.
Table 1. Treatment of SFN. Characteristics and outcomes of studies included in the systematic review.

| Authors, Year | Study Design | Patients. Age | SFN Disease. Age at Onset Diagnosis | Onset SFN Symptoms | Symptoms | Therapy | Conclusions |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| Anderson 2017 [4] | Case report | 1 patient, 35 years old | SFN associated with hantavirus infection | One month after hantavirus infection | Severe, intractable burning limb pain. Allodynia to light touch and hyperalgesia to pinprick in a stocking distribution up to the mid-calf bilaterally | Gabapentin and naproxen | At follow-up 4 months later, his limb pain was only marginally improved |
| Apfel 2000 [5] | Clinical trial level 2 | A: 418 rhNGF B: 461 placebo 18-74 years | Diabetic SFN | - | Neuropathic pain | rhNGF | Significant beneficial effect of rhNGF on diabetic polyneuropathy |
| Aradillas 2015 [6] | Case series level 4 | 33 p, 45.7 years | SFN related to complex regional pain syndrome | 9.7 years | Neuropathic pain | Plasma exchange | Plasma exchange is effective for patients with severe long-standing complex regional pain syndrome |
| Azmi 2015 [7] | Observational study level 2 | 49 patients A: 18 patients with subcutaneous insulin infusion 55.4 ± 2.9 years B: 31 patients with daily insulin injection 49.9 ± 3.3 years | Diabetic SFN | A: 34.8 ± 3.1 years B: 35.2 ± 3.6 years | Neuropathic pain | Continuous subcutaneous insulin Infusion | Daily insulin injection group showed no significant change, but the subcutaneous insulin infusion group showed an improvement in corneal nerve morphology, consistent with regeneration |
| Authors, Year       | Study Design | Patients. Age | SFN Disease. Age at Onset | Onset SFN Symptoms | Symptoms | Therapy | Conclusions |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| Birnbaum 2018 [8]   | Observational study level 2 | 23 patients ~53.6 years 44 ± 13 years | Sjögren’s syndrome | 49.5 ± 23 years | Pain. Eleven patients had stocking-and-glove pain, and 12 patients had non-stocking and-glove pain. Ten SFN patients (~45%) had neuropathic pain preceding sicca symptoms. | Opioid analgesics were prescribed to ~45% of SFN patients | Sjögren’s syndrome SFN had increased frequency of male sex, decreased frequency of multiple antibodies, were frequently treated with opioid analgesics, and could present with nonstocking-and-glove pain |
| Cao 2015 [9]        | Case report 1 patient 36 years | SFN related to idiopathic aquagenic pruritus | ~for 3 y after symptoms | Aquagenic pruritus | Propranolol 10 mg bis in die for 1 month | Atenolol is to be preferred to propranolol, in view of its convenient once-a-day dosing and better side effect profile |
| Dabby 2006 [10]     | Observational study level 2 | 4 patients ~49 years | Idiopathic SFN | - | Neuropathic pain. Symptoms were distal and symmetrical in three patients and generalized in one patient | Prednisone, 1 mg/kg for 12 weeks | Clinical improvement occurred 1–2 weeks after oral prednisone therapy was initiated. |
| De Greef 2016 [11]  | Clinical trial level 2 | 25 patients 18–80 years | SCN9A-associated SFN | - | Pain, altered temperature sensation. | Lacosamide, 200 mg bis in die for 8 weeks | Lacosamide: a potential treatment option in patients with painful neuropathies, considering the central role of Nav1.7 in pain. |
Table 1. Cont.

| Authors, Year | Study Design | Patients. Age | SFN Disease. Age at Onset Diagnosis | Onset SFN Symptoms | Symptoms | Therapy | Conclusions |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| De Greef 2016 [12] | Clinical trial level 2 | 60 patients >18 years | Idiopathic SFN | - | Pain, altered temperature sensation. | Intravenous Immunoglobulins g/kg body weight over 2–4 consecutive days, followed by a maintenance dose of 1 g/kg body weight over 1–2 consecutive days given 3 times at a 3-weeks interval | Positive findings in SFN after intravenous immunoglobulins |
| De Greef 2019 [13] | Clinical trial level 2 | 24 patients ~48 years | SCN-SFN | - | Pain and autonomic dysfunction | Lacosamide, 200 mg bis in die for 8 weeks | Significant effect on pain, general wellbeing, and sleep quality |
| Favoni 2018 [14] | Case report | 1 patient 45 years | Anti-GQ1b antibodies associated with SFN | ~2 y after symptoms | Tingling and burning pain sensation in the arms and legs, with nocturnal exacerbation | Adalimumab: 40 mg every day, subcutaneous administration for 1 year | Benefit from immunotherapy |
| Gaillet 2019 [15] | Retrospective study level 2 | 11 patients 41–62 years | Sjögren’s syndrome | ~6.5 y after symptoms | Pain | 6 months intravenous immunoglobulins infusions, 0.4 g/kg/day for 5 days | Efficacy of intravenous immunoglobulins treatment for pain relief in Sjögren’s Syndrome-SFN with an improvement of quality of life and sensory testing |
Table 1. Cont.

| Authors, Year   | Study Design          | Patients. Age           | SFN Disease, Age at Onset Diagnosis | Onset SFN Symptoms | Symptoms | Therapy                                      | Conclusions                                                                 |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| González-Duarte 2015 [16] | Clinical trial level 2 | 45 patients 15-54 years | Prediabetic SFN                     | -                  | Neuropathic pain                            | Pregabalin was initiated at a dose of 75 mg and tapered up to 300 mg bis in die. | Improvement of prediabetic neuropathic pain with pregabalin                |
| Hilz 2004 [17] | Observational study level 2 | 22 patients A: 11 patients B: 11 patients C: 25 HC 27.9 ± 8 years C: 25 HC 29 ± 10.4 years | Fabry related SFN                  | -                  | Pain                                   | Enzyme replacement therapy A: for 18 months B: for 23 months C: placebo Every 2 weeks, patients were treated with 0.9 to 1.1 mg/kg of agalsidase β | Enzyme replacement therapy with agalsidase beta significantly improves function of C-, A∆-, and Aβ- nerve fibers and intradermal vibration receptors in Fabry neuropathy |
| Hoeijmakers 2016 [18] | Case reports          | 2 patients 15 years    | 1 p idiopathic SFN, 1 p diabetic SFN | -7 y after symptoms | Painful itch and tingling of legs, dyssymptoms | Gabapentin                       | Moderate pain relief with treatment with gabapentin in a case. Treatment with duloxetine, combined with a rehabilitation program, resulted in a marked improvement in daily functioning. |
| Hoitsma 2006 [19] | Observational study level 2 | 1 patient 39 years     | Sarcoidosis-associated SFN          | -                  | fatigue, neuropathic pain, autonomic dysfunction, and arthralgia | Infliximab                       | SFN seems not an irreversible disorder; infliximab had good outcomes |
Table 1. Cont.

| Authors, Year | Study Design | Patients. Age | SFN Disease. Age at Onset Diagnosis | Onset SFN Symptoms | Symptoms | Therapy | Conclusions |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| Hong 2013 [20] | Case report  | 1 patient 64 years | Diabetic SFN | ~2 years | Peripheral neuropathic pain in his both feet | Vibration therapy 3 min of vibration Treatment (total 12 min) at 20 Hz 5 times a week for 4 weeks | The whole-body vibration is a good complementary treatment |
| Kluding 2012 [21] | Observational study level 2 | 17 patients 58.4 ± 5.98 years | Diabetic SFN | 12.4 ± 12.2 years | Pain | 10 weeks aerobic and strengthening exercises | Exercises improve SFN symptoms |
| Keohane 2017 [22] | Clinical trial level 1 | A: 48 patients 18–75 years B: 44 patients 18–75 years | Amyloid SNF | - | Distal-to-proximal sensorimotor neuropathy with autonomic symptoms | A: Tafamidis, 20 mg/d for 18 months B: placebo | Tafamidis delays neurologic progression in early-stage ATTRV30M-FAP. |
| Liu 2018 [23] | Retrospective study level 2 | 55 patients 41 ± 17 years | Autoimmune SFN | 6.3 ± 6.3 years | Neuropathic pain | Intravenous immunoglobulins ≥1 g/kg/4 weeks for ≥3 months. | Intravenous immunoglobulins are safe and effective |
| MacDonald 2019 [24] | Retrospective study level 2 | 87 patients | SFN | 3.2 years | Neuropathic pain | Gabapentin (n = 69), pregabalin (n = 51), duloxetine (n = 41), tricyclic agents (n = 37), and topical cream (e.g., capsaicin, lidocaine; n = 29). | 45.5% of patients had, at some time, been treated with opioid medications for neuropathic pain. |
### Table 1. Cont.

| Authors, Year | Study Design | Patients. Age | SFN Disease. Age at Onset Diagnosis | Onset SFN Symptoms | Symptoms | Therapy | Conclusions |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| Maino 2017 [25] | Case report | 1 patient 74 years | SFN | ~6 years after symptoms | Burning and shooting pain in feet | Dorsal Root Ganglion Stimulation | 20 months post-implantation, the patient continued to experience stimulation-induced paresthesia covering the entire pain area |
| Mishra 2012 [26] | Case report | 1 patient 22 years | SFN | ~6 months after symptoms | Neuropathic pain | Flupirtine 200 mg 3/d along with pregabalin 300 mg 2/d | Reduction of pain after flupirtine |
| Morozumi 2008 [27] | Observational study level 2 | 5 patients 61.8 years | Sarcoidosis-associated SFN | - | Neuropathic pain | Intravenous immunoglobulins 0.4 g/kg/d for 5 days | Beneficial after intravenous immunoglobulins therapy |
| Namer 2019 [28] | Case report | 1 patient 69 years | SNF | ~10 years after symptoms | Burning pain | Lacosamide 50 mg orally in the evening for 6 months | Lacosamide reduced pain in SFN |
| Nevoret 2014 [29] | Case report | 1 patient 60 years | Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy SNP | ~2 years | Neuropathic pain | Intravenous immunoglobulins: 6 doses total, 75 g each + Azathioprine 50 mg bis in die | Less burning, shooting pains and tingling |
| Otis 2013 [30] | Clinical trial level 2 | 20 patients 62.5 ± 10.9 year | Diabetic SFN | - | Neuropathic pain | A: 12 p cognitive-behavioral therapy B: 8 p traditional treatment | Cognitive-behavioral therapy reduced pain |
### Table 1. Cont.

| Authors, Year | Study Design | Patients. Age | SFN Disease. Age at Onset Diagnosis | Onset SFN Symptoms | Therapy | Conclusions |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|-------------|
| Parambil 2010 [31] | Case series | 3 patients | Sarcoidosis-associated SFN | Intractable neuropathic pain, autonomic dysfunction | Intravenous immunoglobulins: 2-g/kg followed by 1-g/kg in 2-weeks, and then received maintenance doses of 1-g/kg every 4-weeks. | Intravenous immunoglobulins appear to be effective in relieving symptoms |
| Patel 2019 [32] | Case report | 1 patient 31 years | SCN-SNF | ~10 years after symptoms | Erythromelalgia, painful flushing and burning paresthesia of the proximal extremities | Carbamazepine 200 mg bis in die | Carbamazepine reduced pain |
| Pereira 2016 [33] | Case series | 13 patients 55 years | Sjögren’s syndrome | ~3 years after symptoms | Neuropathic pain, Paresthesia | 7 p corticosteroids, 7 p mycophenolate mofetil, 6 patients hydroxychloroquine, 5 patients intravenous immunoglobulins, 4 patients cyclophosphamide, 2 patients other immunosuppressive drugs | Treatment with corticosteroids with immunosuppressive drugs, as mycophenolate mofetil, had positive results. In contrast, intravenous immunoglobulins had disappointing results |
### Table 1. Cont.

| Authors, Year | Study Design | Patients. Age | SFN Disease. Age at Onset Diagnosis | Onset SFN Symptoms | Symptoms | Therapy | Conclusions |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| Saito 2015 [34] | Case report | 1 patient 59 years | Sarcoidosis-associated SFN | 10 days | Progressive pain and hypoesthesia of the right lower back associated with fever and constipation | Methylprednisolone 1 g/d for 3 days, followed by prednisolone 40 mg/d | Neurological symptoms were effectively relieved with high-dose steroid therapy |
| Schifffmann 2006 [35] | Clinical trial level 2 | 25 patients ~34 years | Fabry disease-related SFN | - | Neuropathic pain | α galactosidase 0.2 mg/kg every 2 weeks followed for 12 months | Epidermal nerve fiber regeneration did not occur after enzyme replacement therapy |
| Smith 2006 [36] | Observational study level 2 | 32 patients 60 ± 8.4 years | Diabetic SFN | 7 ± 31 years | Neuropathic pain | Rehabilitative exercises | Rehabilitative exercises improved symptoms |
| Tavee 2016 [37] | Retrospective study level 2 | - 115 patients - ~46 years, - 62 patients IVIG, - 12 patients infliximab 14 p IVIG + infliximab - 27 patients not treated | Sarcoidosis-associated SFN | 41 years | Pain, paresthesia, dysautonomic symptoms | Intravenous immunoglobulins 2 mg/kg bodyweight for 5 days; Anti-TNF alpha (infliximab) 5 mg/kg every 4 weeks | Beneficial from intravenous immunoglobulins and anti-TNF alpha in symptoms |
| Authors, Year | Study Design | Patients, Age | SFN Disease, Age at Onset Diagnosis | Onset SFN Symptoms | Symptoms | Therapy | Conclusions |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| Uyesugi 2010  | Case report  | 1 patient, 80 years | Keloid related SFN | 5 years after surgery | Itching, pain, and allodynia | Botulinum toxin type A, 100 U, diluted with 5 mL of preservative-free saline | A keloid was treated successfully with botulinum toxin type A. |
| Wakasugi 2009 | Case report  | 1 patient, 40 years | Sarcoidosis-associated SFN | 2 months | Paresthesia and burning pain in the distal upper and lower limbs. | Intravenous immunoglobulins 2 mg for 5 | Intravenous immunoglobulins therapy was immediately and extremely effective |
| Waldinger 2011 | Case reports | 2 patients ~54.5 years | SFN | ~2.5 years | Unpleasant genital sensations of being on the edge of an orgasm, overactive bladder, absence of erection and ejaculation, or spontaneous ejaculations | TENS | In the male patient, the use of TENS clinically significantly reduced the symptoms of restless genital syndrome, in a female patient, TENS application had no effect on genital complaints and complaints of overactive bladder syndrome. |
| Walega 2014   | Case report  | 1 patient 53 years | Burning mouth syndrome-related SFN | ~6.5 months | Bilateral burning pain in the anterior tongue and mucosa of the lips | Verbal rating scale, Patient’s Global Impression of Change | Bilateral stellate ganglion blockade |
Table 1. Cont.

| Authors, Year | Study Design   | Patients. Age          | SFN Disease. Age at Onset Diagnosis | Onset SFN Symptoms | Symptoms                                      | Therapy                                                                 | Conclusions                                                                 |
|---------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Weintraub 2009 [42] | Clinical trial level 1 | A: 90 patients 61.1 ± 10.4  
B: 104 patients 60.6 ± 12.4 years | Diabetic SNF | - | Neuropathic pain | A: pulsed electromagnetic fields varying intensity and polarity 10–30 min session for 2 h maximum, daily, 12 w  
B: Sham group | Pulsed electromagnetic fields at this dosimetry were ineffective in reducing neuropathic pain |
| Windebank 2004 [43] | Clinical trial level 2 | A: 20 patients, 58.3 ± 12.2 years  
B: 20 patients 62.2 ± 10.7 years | SFN | >6 months | Painful, distal, symmetrical neuropathy | A: IGF-I, 0.05 mg/kg twice daily for 6 months  
B: placebo | IGF-I was safe but did not improve symptoms in this 6-month trial |
| Yuki 2018 [44] | Case report | 3 patients, ~27.3 years | SFN variant of Guillain–Barré syndrome | The three patients developed the symptoms 42, 6 and 11 d, respectively, after symptom onset | Pinprick sensation with hyperesthesia and brush allodynia in a glove-and-stocking distribution | 1 p oral prednisolone 40 Mg/d for 5 days  
2 patients intravenous immunoglobulins | One patient showed no response to intravenous immunoglobulins but a good response to prednisolone. One patient had no significant improvement with prednisolone. One patient had a gradual spontaneous recovery |
| van Velzen 2014 [45] | Clinical trial level 2 | A: 12 patients  
B: 13 patients ~48.6 years | Sarcoidosis-associated SFN | 7 years between the current study and the diagnosis of sarcoidosis | Pain, allodynia, hyperalgesia | A: ARA290, an erythropoietin derivate, intravenous of 2 mg dissolved in 6 mL of normal saline, 3/weeks for 4 weeks  
B: placebo | Long-lasting beneficial effects of ARA 290 |

Small-fiber neuropathies (SFN), rhNGF recombinant human nerve growth factor, insulin-like growth factor-I (IGF-I), Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS).
3. Results

3.1. Description of the Studies

From 1984 to 2019, the database search of 975 articles with the following MeSH terms, words and combinations of words “small fiber neuropathy” AND “rehabilitation” OR “therapy” OR “treatment”, whose titles and abstracts were screened by the reviewers. The papers that remained for full-text screening were 78, and the eligibility of the study inclusion was assessed independently. Forty-two publications met the inclusion criteria and were included in the systematic review. Thirty-six were excluded for the following reasons: 18 involved individuals with different disorders from SFN, 6 examined different topics from our aim, 12 did not present any therapeutic procedure (Figure 1).

![Flowchart of the process of literature search and extraction of studies meeting the inclusion criteria.](example-flowchart)

Figure 1. Flowchart of the process of literature search and extraction of studies meeting the inclusion criteria.

The qualitative information synthesis for each parameter was attributed to the following evidence levels according to the recommendations of the Oxford Center for Evidence-Based Medicine: evidence from a systematic review of randomized controlled trials (1a), controlled clinical studies (2a), case–control-studies (3a) and from non-systematic reviews (4) (Table 1).

3.2. Variations of Experimental Conditions across the Studies

The selected 42 articles were described on the basis of the several therapeutic methods used in each study for the treatment of SFN. Characteristics of the studies are shown in Table 1.

All study groups were not homogeneous for relevant general clinical features as clinical presentation, duration of disease and of the symptoms, kinds of diagnostic measures, the severity of
symptoms, rehabilitation and pharmacological therapy, time of starting therapy, duration of treatment, the follow-up period at the end of the therapy (Table 1).

3.3. Pharmacologic and Rehabilitation Therapy

Many different treatments were experienced. Opioid analgesics [8,21,24] or non-opioid analgesics [22,26], corticosteroids [8,10,33,34,37,44], intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) alone [8,12,15,23,27,31,37,39,46,47] or in combination with other specific drugs, such as azathioprine [29], anti-epileptic drugs [4,11,13,16,18,28,32], immunotherapy [14,19,37], hormone therapy [7,43]. Less used are the following therapeutic strategies, used for specific disorders, such as ARA290, an erythropoietin derivate for sarcoidosis SFN [45], recombinant human nerve growth factor for diabetic SFN [5], propranolol for SFN related to aquagenic pruritus [9], plasma exchange therapy for complex regional pain syndrome [6], enzyme replacement therapy for Fabry related SFN [17,35], botulinum toxin type A for keloid [38].

Furthermore, two specific surgery strategies were described: the stellate ganglion blockade for SFN causing burning mouth syndrome [41] and the dorsal root ganglion stimulation for neuropathic pain of feet [25].

Motor exercises and a rehabilitative program could be part of the treatment strategy [18,20,21,30,36,40,42].

4. Discussion

Our systematic review focused on the several pharmacological and rehabilitative therapies used for SFN. We realized a comprehensive overview to give a guide to ease the collaboration of a multidisciplinary team.

4.1. Comparing Studies: Therapeutic Strategies

To choose the correct therapeutic approach, the first step is to confirm the diagnosis. Then it is essential to search for associated conditions because these could be treatable [48].

Several causes of SFN are potentially treatable [49], such as metabolic syndrome [50,51], and type 2 diabetes [52] associated with SFN. If the condition is not preventable, pharmacologic treatment and rehabilitation could improve the impairment and the quality of life. The treatment of symptoms is mandatory, and the possibility to add exercises and rehabilitation programs could permit to avoid disability and to maintain an adequate quality of life [53].

4.2. The Pharmacological Approaches

The management of neuropathic pain has been a challenging task for physicians [24]. There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of specific medications for the treatment of pain associated with SFN, and the most commonly used medications include antidepressants, anticonvulsants, mexiletine, topical agents, opiates and neuromodulation [34,55]. The guidelines for the pharmacologic management of neuropathic pain and diabetic painful polyneuropathies of the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) and the European Federation of Neurological Societies (EFNS) [56,57] could be adopted for the treatment of SFN. The opioid analgesics may contribute to a centrally-sensitized pain state, which may be refractory to other symptomatic approaches [58], with the activation of microglial cells [58] and of the central glutaminergic system [59]. About 45% of sarcoidosis-related SFN was treated with opioid analgesic therapy as the first approach [8]. In the case report of Mishra et al. [26], flupirtine, a non-opioid analgesic with muscle-relaxing properties, reduced neuropathic pain. Keohane et al. [22] proposed tafamidis, a non-NSAID highly specific transthyretin stabilizer, to delay the neurologic disease progression in the early-stage of transthyretin V30M familial amyloid polyneuropathy. A neuropathic pain related to SFN secondary to a keloid was treated successfully with botulinum toxin type A [38].

Immunotherapy with infliximab [19,37] or adalimumab [14] could play a crucial role in modifying the pathogenesis of SFN in immune-mediated inflammatory diseases [19].
The use of corticosteroids, immunosuppressive and anti-epileptic drugs showed discordant results. No improvements were reported in neuropathic symptoms and pain intensity after corticosteroid treatment in Sjogren, sarcoidosis and Guillain–Barré related SFN [8,37,44], or marked clinical improvement, according to other studies [10,33,34]. No clinical improvements were noted with methotrexate [37], but positive results with mycophenolate mofetil [33]. Nevoret et al. [29] added azathioprine to IVIG therapy, with consequent improvement in neuropathic symptomatology.

The benefits of intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) were reported for neuropathic pain in Sjogren [8,27]. In 8 studies, the efficacy and safety of IVig are evaluated in patients with different features of SFN [12,15,23,27,31,37,39,46,47]. In contrast, IVIG had disappointing results, according to Pereira et al. [33] and Yuki et al. [44].

Gonzalez-Duarte et al. [16] showed improvements in prediabetic neuropathic pain after pregabalin treatment. De Groot et al. [11,13], Namer et al. [28] and Brouwer et al. [60] assessed the efficacy, safety, and tolerability of lacosamide, an anticonvulsant, in patients with SCN-associated small fiber neuropathy. Carbamazepine is useful to reduce SFN-related neuropathy [32] too. Gabapentin and naproxen [4] or duloxetine [18] were used for SFN associated with hantavirus infection [4] or in the absence of results with other therapies [4].

Enzyme replacement therapy (ERT) with recombinant human α-galactosidase significantly improved the function of C-, A∆-, and Aβ- nerve fibers and intradermal vibration receptors in Fabry neuropathy [17]. But according to Schiffrmann et al. [35] epidermal nerve fiber regeneration did not occur after ERT. Van Velzen et al. [45] described the long-lasting beneficial effects of ARA290, an erythropoietin derivate, in symptoms of sarcoidosis-related SFN in patients. According to Apfel et al. [5], recombinant human nerve growth factors had significant beneficial effects on diabetic polyneuropathy. In the case report of Cao et al. [9], SFN related to aquagenic pruritus was treated with propranolol with significant benefit after a month of therapy. Plasma exchange therapy is effective in patients with severe long-standing complex regional pain syndrome [6].

### 4.3. Surgical Approaches

Stellate ganglion blockade [41] for recalcitrant pain in burning mouth syndrome and dorsal root ganglion stimulation [25] induced paraesthesia covering the entire pain area could be an effective therapy in SFN.

### 4.4. Rehabilitative Program

Another important field of therapy in SFN is the rehabilitation that could be added at a pharmacologic treatment [21,36] or used in the absence of pharmacologic results [18] and could be the first step of a therapy protocol (Table 2).

| Authors       | Rehabilitation Program | Note                                                                 |
|---------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hoeijmakers 2016 [18] | -                      | After no results with a pharmacologic approach, the rehabilitation program was added |
| Hong 2013 [20] | Four bouts of 3 min of vibration treatment (total 12 min) at 20 Hz five times a week for four weeks. | Body vibration reduced acute and long-term pain in diabetics |
| Kluding 2012 [21] | 10-week exercise program with both aerobic and strengthening and resistance exercises significantly improved selected measures of peripheral nerve function, with a reduction in pain and neuropathic symptoms | The rehabilitation improved the neuropathic symptoms, nerve function and cutaneous innervation. Rehbitilative exercises were added to the pharmacologic approach in diabetic SFN |
Table 2. Cont.

| Authors            | Rehabilitation Program                                                                 | Note                                                                 |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Otis 2013 [30]     | Cognitive behavioral: each session of 60 min for 11 weeks                               | For neuropathic pain in diabetic neuropathy                          |
| Smith 2006 [36]    | 80 min for 73 weeks with improvement in neuropathic symptoms                            | Rehabilitative program was added to the pharmacologic approach in diabetic SFN |
| Waldinger 2011 [40]| Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) in SFN for restless genital syndrome (ReGS) of dorsal nerve penis and in overactive bladder syndrome (OAB). |                                                                      |
| Weintraub 2009 [42]| Pulsed electromagnetic fields was ineffective in reducing diabetic neuropathic pain    |                                                                      |

4.5. Implication in Rehabilitation

Early recognition of SFN is important to start an appropriate and prompt treatment. The aim of therapy is to relieve the neuropathic symptoms. The reduction of pain and the improvement in quality of life and in the ability to participate in activities is the purpose of rehabilitation approaches and could be the best complementary treatment to pharmacologic strategies. Specific exercises with proprioceptive and superficial sensibility stimulation could enhance recovery. Exercise may positively influence the pathological factors associated with neuropathy by promoting microvascular dilation, reducing oxidative stress, and increasing neurotrophic factors [61,62].

5. Limitations

A lack of uniformity among the papers (measured parameters and assessment scale) may affect the outcomes of considered articles. The absence of information about some clinical characteristics that could influence the symptomatology represents another limitation, such as comorbidities, the use of other specific drugs, psychologic traits. Furthermore, in some articles, the sample was very small. Several studies did not assess participants’ educational status; it could be a confounding factor and could influence the results.

6. Conclusions

The treatment of SFN is indispensable for the improvement of quality of life of individuals with neuropathic symptoms. SFN has a negative psychosocial impact on the lives of the patients and of their families.

We showed all the therapeutic approaches described in the current literature for SFN. On the basis of the different treatments, the physicians could obtain a guide and a common protocol for a multidisciplinary team. Despite the range of therapies for SFN, robust trials miss and always different therapeutic approaches are used. A comprehensive overview could give a guide to the physicians, and a complete protocol could ease the therapeutic and diagnostic approach to small fiber neuropathies. More research is needed to build evidence for the best therapy and to delineate a definitive therapeutic protocol.

Author Contributions: M.V., R.C., M.R., P.P., G.M., and G.L.M. conceived of the presented idea and verified the methods. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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