



Inpatient Rehabilitation for Functional Neurological Disorder

What is Functional Neurological Disorder (FND)?

Functional neurological disorder is a condition in which the body's nervous system, which sends signals between a person's body and brain, is disrupted. In FND, there is no evidence of structural brain damage to the brain or body that cause symptoms. This does NOT mean that symptoms are not real. In fact, symptoms of FND can significantly impact your child's functioning at home, at school, and socially.

We can think about FND like a software problem on a computer, where all the "hardware" (your child's brain and body) is intact, but the "software" (the processes your child uses to move, speak, and think) is malfunctioning.

What symptoms are common in FND?

FND is a broad diagnosis that can look different in each child. Because FND impacts the communication between your child's brain and body, your child may experience a wide range of symptoms. Some common symptoms experienced by youth with FND include:

- Events that look like seizures (no seizure activity is detected)
- "Blackouts"
- Staring into space for long periods of time
- Tremors
- Difficulty walking/changes in walking
- Difficulties with speech
- Memory difficulties
- Muscle weakness

If there is nothing physically wrong with my child, does this mean that their symptoms are not real?

No. Symptoms of FND are very real. Your child is not imagining, making up, or causing their symptoms. FND is a real medical diagnosis that is caused by dysfunction in the body's nervous system.

What causes FND?

We are not entirely sure why some children develop FND and others do not. Research has indicated that several factors — including biological, psychological, and social factors — interact in complicated and not fully understood ways to contribute to the development of FND.

How is FND treated?

Depending on your child's specific symptoms, various treatments may be recommended. Research indicates that a multi-disciplinary approach is most effective when treating FND. Depending on your child's particular symptoms, physical therapy, occupational therapy, vestibular therapy, speech therapy, psychotherapy, and/or psychiatry may be recommended.

What is Inpatient Rehabilitation and how can it help?

Inpatient rehabilitation at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh is offered at the Children's Hospital Rehabilitation Unit (CHRU). The FND program is designed for children, adolescents, and young adults with new or persistent symptoms of altered motor or sensory functions. This program is available to individuals presenting with primarily gait abnormalities in upper and/or lower extremities. Individuals with chronic and/or amplified pain, and those with other functional presentations such as non-epileptic events or special sensory symptoms are not appropriate for this protocol. The symptoms must cause a clinically significant impairment in the patient's functioning.

The inpatient rehabilitation program for FND at the CHRU includes the following:

- Care of a physiatrist and nursing team
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Behavioral health services
- School services

Throughout their stay, the patient will complete a "goal mountain" of stepwise therapy tasks throughout their stay with OT and PT (totaling three hours of therapy daily). Additionally, the patient will participate in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions with the rehabilitation psychologist and attend school sessions with the rehabilitation teacher. At discharge, referrals for outpatient behavioral health and other therapies will be provided if appropriate.

How do I access Rehabilitation Services for FND?

Most patients are referred to the CHRU from an inpatient hospital unit. While at the hospital, the patient is evaluated by a medical specialist in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) to determine if the CHRU program is appropriate. Behavioral health will also evaluate the patient to determine eligibility for admission.