

Correspondence

Letter to the Editor: Myalgic Encephalomyelitis and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: Definitions, Similarities, and Differences



Dear Dr. Shader:

In a recent article, Natelson¹ provides evidence for his position that myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) and fibromyalgia are two different illnesses. However, using the label ME/CFS in this context is inappropriate because the case criteria used by the author define CFS² and systemic exertion intolerance disease (SEID)³ not ME.⁴ ME, CFS, and SEID, incorrectly labeled ME/CFS, are three different clinical entities.⁵ ME is a neuromuscular disease with four distinctive features: muscle fatigability/postexertional muscle weakness lasting for days; neurologic disturbance, especially of cognitive, autonomic, and sensory functions; fluctuation of symptoms; and a prolonged relapsing course.⁵ As explained by Natelson,¹ the only mandatory feature of CFS is (unexplained) chronic fatigue, which is accompanied by at least 4 of 8 symptoms: sore throat, tender lymph glands, headache, myalgia, arthralgia, unrefreshing sleep, difficulty with attention and concentration, and postexertional malaise. ME

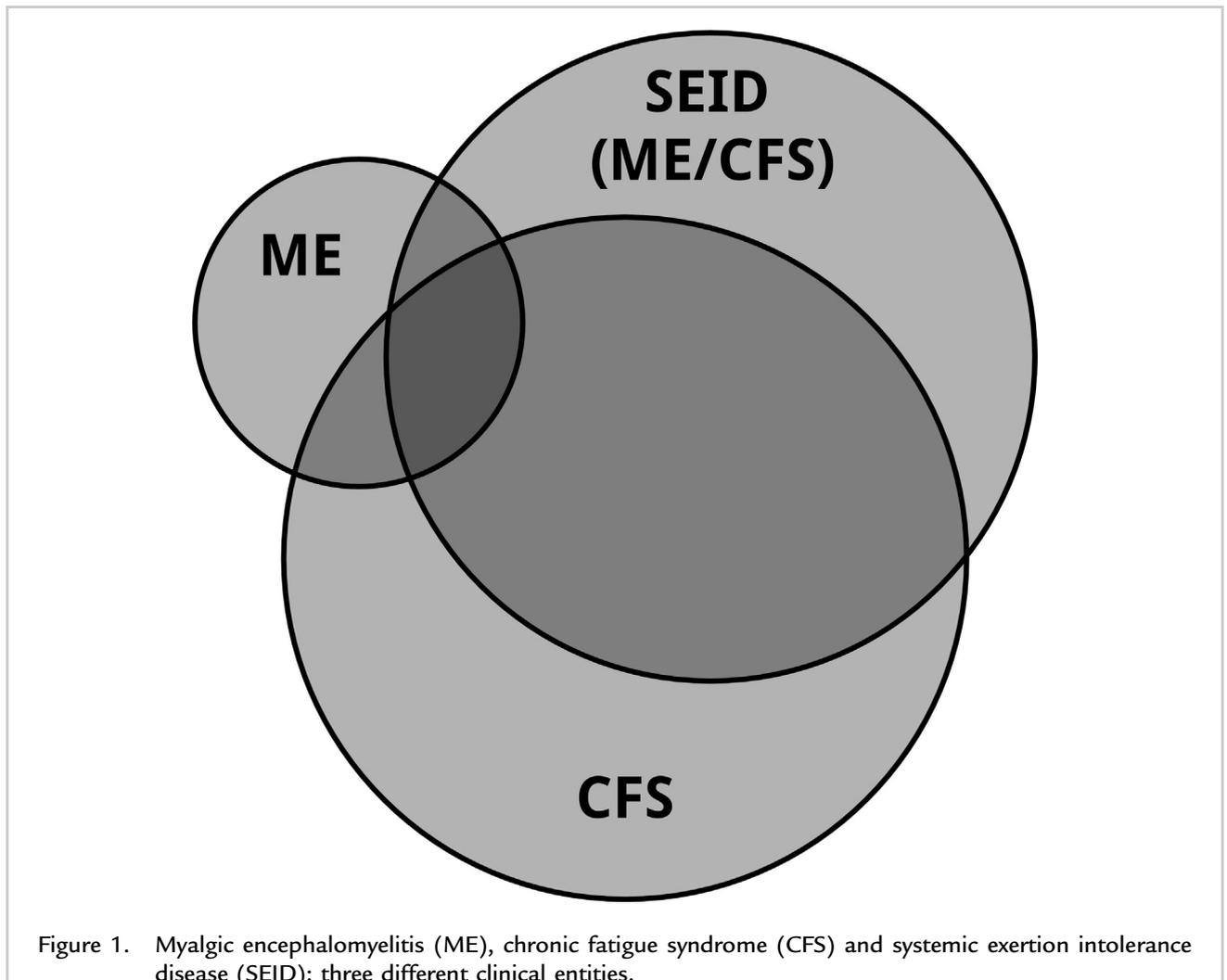


Figure 1. Myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and systemic exertion intolerance disease (SEID): three different clinical entities.

and CFS are two distinctive clinical entities by definition. SEID (ME/CFS) is defined as chronic fatigue that produces a substantial decrease in activity and moderate, substantial, or severe problems at least half the time with unrefreshing sleep, postexertional malaise, and either cognitive problems or orthostatic intolerance.³ The diagnostic criteria for SEID (ME/CFS) exclude a subgroup of patients with CFS and include substantial subgroups of patients with (explained and idiopathic) chronic fatigue and well-known medical and psychological diseases.⁵ Although a patient can meet the diagnosis ME, CFS, and SEID (ME/CFS), ME, CFS, and SEID are three very distinct clinical entities (Fig 1). Considering ME, CFS, and SEID as synonyms or conflating ME and CFS (into SEID) does not do justice to ME and CFS.

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