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**A novel single dominant *DYNC1H1* pathogenic variant causes  
various upper and lower motor neuron anomalies**

Authors: Yue Si, MD, PhD; Kathryn J Swoboda, MD; Rong Mao, MD; Hunter Best, PhD; Youna Ha, BSc; Annick Toutain, MD, PhD; Lucie Guyant-Marechal, MD; Cecile Laroche-Raynaud, MD; Karima Ghorab, MD; Marie Anne Barthez, MD; Jean Michel Pedespan, MD; Xavier Hernandorena, MD; Anne-Sophie Lia, PhD; Jean-Francois Deleuze, PhD; Cecile Masson, MSc; Isabelle Nelson, PhD; Juliette Nectoux, PharmD, PhD and Louis M Viollet, MD, PhD

Yue Si, ARUP Institute for Clinical and Experimental Pathology, ARUP laboratories and Department of Pathology, University of Utah School of Medicine, Salt Lake City, UT; GeneDx, Whole Exome Sequencing Program, Gaithersburg, MD

Kathryn Swoboda, Pediatric Motor Disorders Research Program, University of Utah School of Medicine, Salt Lake City, UT and Department of Neurology, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA

Rong Mao, ARUP Institute for Clinical and Experimental Pathology, ARUP laboratories and Departments of Pathology and Medical Genetics/Pediatrics, University of Utah School of Medicine, Salt Lake City, UT

Hunter Best, ARUP Institute for Clinical and Experimental Pathology, ARUP laboratories and Departments of Pathology and Medical Genetics/Pediatrics, University of Utah School of Medicine, Salt Lake City, UT

Youna Ha, ARUP Institute for Clinical and Experimental Pathology, ARUP laboratories, Salt Lake City, UT

Annick Toutain, Génétique clinique, Hopital Bretonneau, Tours, France

Lucie Guyant-Marechal, Genetique Clinique, Hopital Charles Nicolle, Rouen, France

Cecile Laroche-Raynaud, Neuropediatrie, Hopital Mere et Enfant, Limoges, France

Karima Ghorab, Neurologie, Hopital Dupuytren, Limoges, France

Marie Anne Barthez, Neuropediatrie, CHU de Tours, Hopital Clocheville, France

Jean Michel Pedespan, Neuropediatrie, Hopital Pellegrin, Bordeaux, France

Xavier Hernandorena, Pediatrie, Centre Hospitalier de la Cote Basque, Bayonne, France

Anne-Sophie Lia, Biochimie et Genetique Moleculaire, Hopital Dupuytren, Limoges, France

Jean-Francois Deleuze, CEA-CNG, Evry, France

Cecile Masson, Institut Imagine, Hopital Necker Enfants Malades, Paris, France

Isabelle Nelson, Institut de Myologie, Hopital Pitie Salpetriere, France

Juliette Nectoux, Biochimie et Genetique Moleculaire, Hopital Cochin, Paris, France.

Louis Viollet, Pediatric Motor Disorders Research Program and Department of Medical Genetics/Pediatrics, University of Utah School of Medicine, Salt Lake City, UT

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Corresponding Author:

Yue Si

GeneDx

Whole Exome Sequencing Program

207 Perry Parkway

Gaithersburg, MD 20877

[ysi@genedx.com](mailto:ysi@genedx.com)

Louis M VIOLLET

Division of Medical Genetics/Department of Pediatrics

The University of Utah

295 Chipeta Way

Salt Lake City, Utah 84108

Phone: (801) 213-3599

Fax: (801) 585-7252

[louis.viollet@hsc.utah.edu](mailto:louis.viollet@hsc.utah.edu)

[ysi@genedx.com](mailto:ysi@genedx.com)

[Kathryn J Swoboda KSWOBODA@mgh.harvard.edu](mailto:Kathryn.J.Swoboda@mgh.harvard.edu)

[Rong Mao rong.mao@aruplab.com](mailto:Rong.Mao@aruplab.com)

[Hunter Best hunter.best@aruplab.com](mailto:Hunter.Best@aruplab.com)

[Youna Ha youna.ha@aruplab.com](mailto:Youna.Ha@aruplab.com)

[Annick Toutain annick.toutain@univ-tours.fr](mailto:Annick.Toutain@univ-tours.fr)

[Lucie Guyant-Marechal Lucie.Guyant@chu-rouen.fr](mailto:Lucie.Guyant@chu-rouen.fr)

[Cecile Laroche-Raynaud cecile.laroche@chu-limoges.fr](mailto:Cecile.Laroche-Raynaud@chu-limoges.fr)

[Karima Ghorab karima.ghorab@chu-limoges.fr](mailto:Karima.Ghorab@chu-limoges.fr)

[Marie Anne Barthez ma.barthez@chu-tours.fr](mailto:Marie.Anne.Barthez@chu-tours.fr)

[Jean Michel Pedespan jean-michel.pedespan@chu-bordeaux.fr](mailto:Jean.Michel.Pedespan@chu-bordeaux.fr)

[Xavier Hernandorena xhernandorena001@ch-cotabasque.fr](mailto:Xavier.Hernandorena@ch-cotabasque.fr)

[Anne-Sophie Lia asliabaldini@unilim.fr](mailto:Anne-Sophie.Lia@unilim.fr)

[Jean-Francois Deleuze isabelle.laudier@cea.fr](mailto:Jean-Francois.Deleuze@cea.fr)

[Cecile Masson cecile.masson@gmail.com](mailto:Cecile.Masson@gmail.com)

[Isabelle Nelson isabelle.nelson@upmc.fr](mailto:Isabelle.Nelson@upmc.fr)

[Juliette Nectoux juliette.nectoux@aphp.fr](mailto:Juliette.Nectoux@aphp.fr)

[Louis M Viollet louis.viollet@hsc.utah.edu](mailto:Louis.M.Viollet@hsc.utah.edu)

Search Terms: Spinal Muscular Atrophy, Spastic Paraplegia, Motor neuropathy, Motor neuron disease, Dynein motor complex, Exome, Next Generation Sequencing

Author Contributions:

Yue Si, design and conceptualization of the laboratory investigation, acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data, drafting/revising manuscript

113  
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115 Kathryn J. Swoboda, analysis or interpretation of data, revising manuscript  
116 Rong Mao, analysis or interpretation of data, drafting/revising manuscript  
117 Hunter Best, acquisition of data, analysis or interpretation of data  
118 Youna Ha, acquisition of data, analysis or interpretation of data  
119 Annick Toutain, acquisition of data, revising manuscript  
120 Lucie Guyant-Marechal, acquisition of data, revising manuscript for content  
121 Cecile Laroche-Raynaud, acquisition of data, revising manuscript  
122 Karima Ghorab, acquisition of data, revising manuscript  
123 Marie Anne Barthez, acquisition of data, revising manuscript  
124 Jean Michel Pedespan, acquisition of data, revising manuscript  
125 Xavier Hernandorena, acquisition of data, revising manuscript  
126 Anne-Sophie Lia, analysis or interpretation of data  
127 Jean-Francois Deleuze, analysis or interpretation of data  
128 Cecile Masson, analysis or interpretation of data  
129 Isabelle Nelson, analysis or interpretation of data  
130 Juliette Nectoux, analysis or interpretation of data, drafting/revising manuscript  
131 Louis Viollet, design and conceptualization the clinical investigation, acquisition of data,  
132 analysis or interpretation of data, drafting/revising manuscript  
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## Abstract

**Objective:** To perform genotype-phenotype, clinical and molecular analysis in a large 3-generation family with autosomal dominant congenital spinal muscular atrophy.

**Methods:** Using a combined genetic approach including whole genome scanning, next generation sequencing-based multigene panel and targeted variant Sanger sequencing, we studied the proband and multiple affected individuals of this family who presented with bilateral proximal lower limb muscle weakness and atrophy.

**Results:** we identified a novel heterozygous variant, c.1826T>C; p.Ile609Thr, in the *DYNC1H1* gene localized within the common haplotype in the 14q32.31 chromosomal region cosegregated with disease in this large family. Within the family, affected individuals were found to have a wide array of clinical variability. Although some individuals presented the typical lower motor neuron phenotype (SMA-LED) with areflexia and denervation, others presented with muscle weakness and atrophy, hyperreflexia and absence of denervation suggesting a predominant upper motor neuron disease. In addition, some affected individuals presented with an intermediate phenotype characterized by hyperreflexia and denervation, expressing a combination of lower and upper motor neuron defects.

**Conclusion:** Our study demonstrates the wide clinical variability associated with a single *DYNC1H1* mutation and this mutation demonstrated a high penetrance within this large family.

Key words:

***DYNC1H1***, Spinal muscular atrophies, Exome

## Introduction

Motor neuron disorders from a large spectrum of inherited diseases including spinal muscular atrophies (SMA), familial amyotrophic lateral scleroses (FALS), hereditary spastic paraplegias (HSP) and overlapping phenotypes. Each of these diseases are genetically heterogeneous and are commonly classified by their mode of inheritance, the spatial distribution of muscle weakness, the age at onset, the severity and the occasional presence of additional clinical features.<sup>1,2</sup>

Autosomal dominant Spinal Muscular Atrophy with Lower limb predominance (SMA-LED; OMIM# [158600](#)) is a clinically well characterized type of SMA, with autosomal dominant inheritance,

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227 congenital or early childhood onset, lower limb predominant weakness and slow or absent  
228 progression.<sup>3-7</sup> Two genes have been associated with SMA-LED: *DYNC1H1* (Dynein Heavy  
229 Chain 1), coding for a major component of the Dynein-Dynactin motor complex and *BICD2*  
230 (Bicaudal D2) a molecular partner of *DYNC1H1*.<sup>8-20</sup> Mutations in both of these genes cause lower  
231 and upper motor neuron diseases. Some *DYNC1H1* mutations cause SMA-LED, others cause  
232 axonal Charcot Marie Tooth disease (CMT 20 ; OMIM# [614228](#)) and some mutations cause  
233 hereditary spastic paraplegia (SPG3 ; OMIM# 182600)<sup>9,14,16,21</sup>. Here we studied a large 3-  
234 generation family with 21 affected members presenting bilateral lower limb weakness and muscle  
235 atrophy with neurological findings revealing a variable combination of upper and lower motor  
236 neurons defects among the individuals. Using a combined genetic approach, we identified a  
237 unique novel N-terminal tail domain heterozygous missense mutation (Ile609Thr) in the gene  
238 *DYNC1H1* in all these individuals, which suggests a significant role of modifying genes in the  
239 neuronal expression pattern of *DYNC1H1* gene mutations.  
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## 254 **Patients and methods**

### 255 **Data Collection**

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257 Patients belong to a large three-generation pedigree with 21 affected individuals with ages  
258 ranging from 64 to 13 years (figure1). Patients with history of non-progressive bilateral pelvic  
259 girdle muscles weakness since childhood were considered affected. Medical records from 7  
260 clinical centers in France (Tours, Limoges, Bordeaux, Rouen, Bayonne, Paris, Avignon) were  
261 reviewed for 18 affected individuals and electrophysiological studies were conducted in 16 of  
262 them. Peripheral blood DNA was obtained after informed consent from 20 affected and 15 non  
263 affected subjects.  
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### 274 **Next generation sequencing (NGS) based multigene panel screening**

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283 NGS was performed on the proband (II16) using DNA extracted from whole blood. Proband's DNA  
284 sample (II16) was captured using the multigene panel for Charcot Marie Tooth diseases (NSPv.20  
285 CMT NimbleGen, developed and validated by ARUP Lab) and sequenced with 2X100 bp paired  
286 end on an Illumina 2500 according to manufacturer's recommendation. Sequence variants were  
287 called with Genome Analysis Toolkit (v.1.6) and filtered using DbSNP, 1000 Genomes Project,  
288 6500 Exomes and the ARUP internal database. In silico analyses of variants were performed  
289 using PolyPhen2 (<http://genetics.bwh.harvard.edu/pph2/>), SIFT (<http://sift.jcvi.org/>), and  
290 MutationTaster (<http://www.mutationtaster.org/>) to predict the possible disruption of protein  
291 functions.  
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### 303 **DNA Sanger sequencing**

304 Amplicon of *DYNC1H1* exon 8 was amplified in the DNA of the 20 affected and 10 non affected  
305 individuals and sequenced using BigDye® Terminator Cycle Sequencing Kit (Applied Biosystems,  
306 Carlsbad, California) on an Applied Biosystems 3730 DNA Analyzer. Primer sequences are  
307 available upon request.  
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### 313 **Haplotype analysis**

314 A genome-wide scan analysis was performed among the DNAs of 15 patients, using 1,088  
315 microsatellite markers with an average marker distance of 4cM (DeCode Genetics). Haplotype  
316 analysis at the candidate 14q32.2-q32.3 chromosomal region was performed in 20 affected  
317 individuals. Parametric computerized linkage analysis (MERLIN software) was made at the locus  
318 D14s979. For LOD score calculation, we used a model of rare autosomal dominant disease  
319 (prevalence 1.10,000), a 100% penetrance and a 0% phenocopy parameter. Allele frequencies  
320 at the selected locus were obtained from the online databases for Caucasian population (CEPH).  
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### 331 **Results**

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### Various neurological phenotypes in the same family

All the individuals examined presented childhood onset proximal weakness without deterioration of motor function over time. None of them had arthrogryposis or feet deformity at birth and all were able to walk independently at time of observation. Neurological examination and electrophysiological studies revealed remarkable differences with a variable combination of lower motor neuron disease symptoms (areflexia, distal muscle wasting, foot deformity, electrical denervation) and upper motor neuron symptoms (hyperreflexia, ankle clonus, abolished somatosensory evoked potentials). These findings are summarized in table 1. Five patients presented a pure lower motor neuron disease with a pattern of chronic denervation, corresponding to the typical SMA-LED phenotype (see patient III16 in table 2 and figure 2A). Five other patients, did not show evidence of denervation but exhibited spasticity in the lower limbs meeting the criteria of a pure hereditary spastic paraplegia (see patient II10 in table 2 and III14 in figure 2B). The other 6 patients presented an intermediate phenotype with lower and motor neuron disease symptoms (see patient III7 in table 2 and figure 2C). Mental function evaluation was not performed but most of the patients presented learning difficulties at school.

### Identification of a novel tail domain mutation in the gene *DYNC1H1*

Next generation sequencing-based multigene panel in patient III16 allowed to identify a heterozygous variant, c.1826T>C, in the coding sequence of exon 8 of gene coding for the Heavy Chain 1 of Cytoplasmic Dynein (*DYNC1H1*). This variant, not previously reported in the literature or population databases, causes a missense mutation p.Ile609Thr at the protein level in a highly conserved region among vertebrate species. The mutation maps to the N-terminal region which is the dimerization domain at the stem of *DYNC1H1*, mediating the formation of dynein heavy chain dimers and interactions with dynein intermediate light chains. Ile609Thr is predicted to be pathogenic by the computational prediction programs (SIFT, PolyPhen and MutationTaster). Whole genome sequencing in patient III16 and III3 showed the same heterozygous variant and



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395 no other pathogenic variants were identified in the currently known dominant genes that could  
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397 lead to motor neuron defect. Targeted Sanger sequencing of *DYNC1H1* exon 8 further showed  
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399 the cosegregation of the variant, Ile609Thr, in the 20 affected individuals tested of this family. This  
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401 variant was absent in the 10 non-affected individuals tested.  
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### 403 404 405 **Genetic linkage to the *DYNC1H1* gene locus on chromosome 14q32.3**

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407 Whole genome scanning and haplotype analysis on 20 affected individuals presenting the three  
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409 previously reported clinical presentations refined the locus of the disease to the same  
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411 chromosomal region containing the entire sequence of gene *DYNC1H1* (14q32.3, between loci  
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413 D14S1066 and D14S1007), cosegregating with an autosomal dominant pattern. Linkage analysis  
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415 demonstrated a positive value with a maximum LOD score at marker D14s979 ( $Z_{\max}=5.30$ ) at  
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417 the recombination fraction  $\theta = 0.00$  (data available on request).  
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### 419 420 **Discussion**

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422 Spinal muscular atrophy with autosomal dominance inheritance is a clinically heterogeneous  
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424 subgroup of hereditary motor neuropathies, involving multiple genes and various molecular  
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426 pathways.<sup>24</sup> Among them, Spinal Muscular Atrophy with Lower limb predominance and autosomal  
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428 dominant inheritance (SMA-LED) is a lower motor neuron disease recently described,  
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430 characterized by almost exclusive involvement of lower limbs, proximal predominance of muscle  
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432 weakness, frequent distal muscle wasting and mild or absent progression and a typical muscle  
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434 MRI imaging pattern with a diffuse involvement of the quadriceps and a relative sparing of the  
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436 adductor compartment<sup>10,17</sup> SMA-LED has been initially linked to mutations of gene *DYNC1H1*, a  
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438 major component of the Dynein-Dynactin motor protein complex. The 30 reported *DYNC1H1*  
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440 mutations associated to the SMA-LED phenotype,<sup>8,9,13,14,16, 17,18,19</sup> are almost always located in the  
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442 stem domain of the protein, while mutations located in the motor domain of *DYNC1H1* are  
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444 reported in malformations of cortical development (MCD) and intellectual disability<sup>15,22,23,25</sup> without  
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451 or with limited lower motor neuron involvement. We report in this study a novel *DYNC1H1*  
452 mutation located in the stem domain, affecting both lower and upper motor neurons at various  
453 degrees, with a broad phenotypical range extending from a pure motor neuropathy to a pure  
454 spastic paraplegia. In fact, other *DYNC1H1* tail domain mutations has already been reported in  
455 patients presenting Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia (HPN)<sup>14</sup> and the involvement of upper motor  
456 neurons has already been evoked in SMA-LED<sup>17</sup> or even with MCD23 patients presenting  
457 hyperreflexia of the lower limbs. In our study a same *DYNC1H1* mutation is associated with either  
458 a pure motor neuron disease (SMA-LED), a pure upper motor neuron disease (HSP) or an  
459 intermediate phenotype. This suggests that the type of neuronal expression might be influenced  
460 by other factors than by the protein variant itself. These factors could be epigenetic or more  
461 probably genetic, as suggested by the clustering of pure HSP phenotypes in a same branch of  
462 the family studied here (a mother with her 3 sons). Note that this pleotropic effect of a unique  
463 *DYNC1H1* tail domain mutation has been reported by Tsurusacki et al, in a family with either  
464 autosomal dominant axonal CMT or SMA-LED phenotype.<sup>9</sup> A similar combination of upper and  
465 lower motor neuron diseases has been reported in the phenotypical spectrum related to gene  
466 *BICD2* (Bicaudal D Homolog 2) mutations<sup>11,12</sup>, a key adaptor protein interacting with *DYNC1H1*.  
467 *BICD2* mutations are responsible for a pure autosomal dominant spinal muscular atrophy  
468 phenotype (SMA-LED2), a pure HSP and a phenotype combining lower limbs hyperreflexia and  
469 SMA-LED2.<sup>10,11,12</sup> An increasing number of scientific data shows that Golgi functional and  
470 structural defects is a common pathophysiological feature of several lower and upper motor  
471 neuron diseases. In another hand, Dynein-Dynactin motor protein complex plays a key role in  
472 Golgi structure, dynamics and localization. Reported missense *DYNC1H1* tail mutations increase  
473 *BICD2-DYNC1H1* interactions, decreasing the binding of the Dynein–Dynactin motor complex to  
474 microtubules in a dominant negative manner. The subsequent impairment of cellular transport  
475 and Golgi function in *DYNC1H1* related disorders plays probably a major role in motor neurons  
476 dysfunction.<sup>16,18,26</sup>  
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507 Figure 1. Pedigree of the 3 generations family with autosomal dominant inheritance. Filled  
508 symbols represent the affected individuals. The specific phenotypes are color coded: red symbols  
509 are used for pure Lower motor neuron phenotype (Spinal Muscular Atrophy); blue symbols for  
510 pure upper motor neuron phenotype (Spastic Paraplegia); green symbols for combined lower and  
511 upper motor neuron phenotype; black symbols for affected individuals without medical record  
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563 Table 1: Clinical and electrophysiological characteristics of 16 patients of the same family.  
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565 Neurogenic EMG pattern is defined by decreased or absent recruitment and large amplitude  
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567 potentials. ND = not documented. Osteotendinous reflexes scale: 0 = absent, 1+= present only  
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569 with reinforcement 2+= normal, 3+=brisk, 4+= markedly hyperactive with clonus.  
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571 Table 2: Summary of the clinical informations from 3 patients presenting a pure upper motor  
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573 neuron phenotype (III6), a pure upper motor neuron phenotype (II10) and a combined phenotype  
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575 (III7)  
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619 Figure 2. Pictures of 3 patients presenting the SMA-LED phenotype (A-III16), the HSP phenotype  
620 (B-III14) and the combined upper and lower motor neuron phenotype (C-III17). Thigh muscles  
621 wasting is more pronounced in patients III4 and III17 although pelvic girdle weakness is a common  
622 feature of all affected individuals in this family.  
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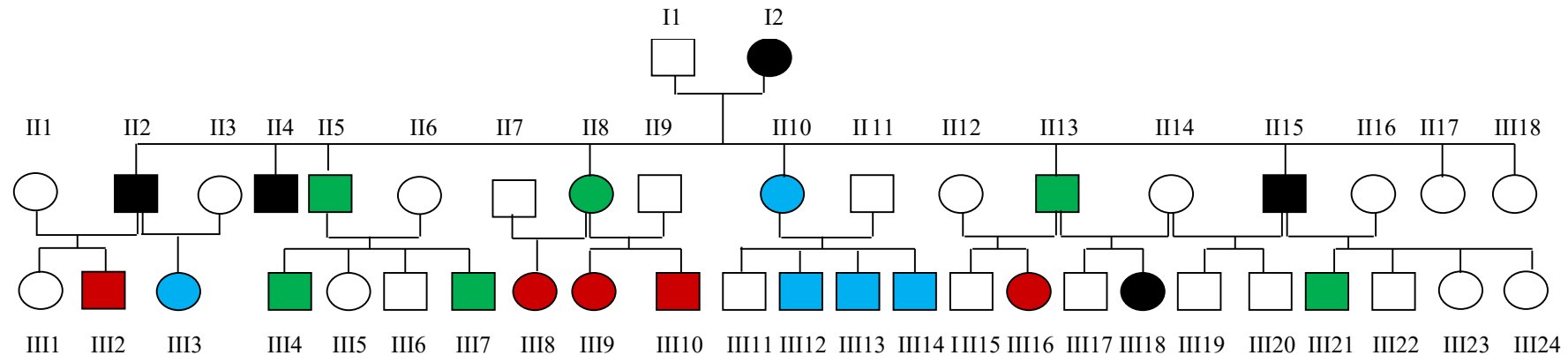
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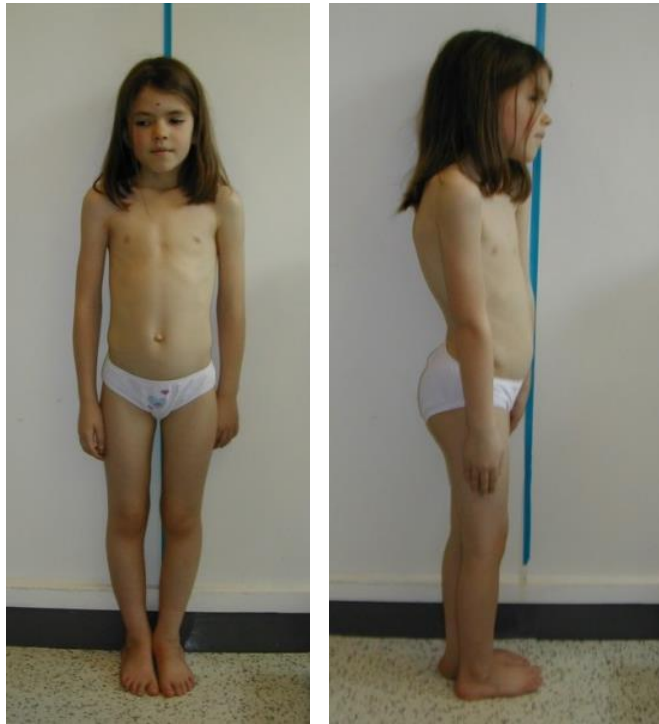
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Figure 1



**Figure 2**

**A. Individual III16**



**B. Individual III14**



**C. Individual III7**



<b>Patients</b>	<b>Age at last physical examination</b>	<b>Distribution of muscle atrophy</b>	<b>Feet deformity</b>	<b>Knee reflexes</b>	<b>Ankle reflexes</b>	<b>Age at EMG</b>	<b>EMG Lower limbs</b>	<b>Lower limbs motor and sensory NCVs</b>
II 5	42yo	thighs	high arched	2+	4+	35yo	neurogenic	normal
II 8	42yo	legs	high arched	0	3+	41yo	neurogenic	normal
II 10	46yo	legs and thighs	ND	2+	4+	46yo	normal	normal
II 13	44yo	legs	ND	ND	ND	44yo	normal	normal
III 2	4yo	legs	flat	0	0	4yo	neurogenic	normal
III 3	4yo	ND	flat	2+	3+	15yo	normal	normal
III 4	3yo	thighs and legs	flat	2+	1+	ND	ND	ND
III 7	5yo	legs and thighs	flat	3+	4+	4yo	neurogenic	normal
III 8	17yo	ND	high arched	2+	2+	27yo	neurogenic	normal
III 9	15yo	ND	high arched	0	1+	2yo	neurogenic	normal
III 10	17yo	legs and thighs	ND	0	1+	3yo	neurogenic	normal
III 12	19yo	legs and thighs	flat	3+	3+	14yo	normal	normal
III 13	19yo	legs and thighs	flat	3+	4+	14yo	normal	normal
III 14	23yo	legs and thighs	yes	2+	4+	18yo	normal	ND
III 16	5yo	legs	flat	1+	1+	12yo	neurogenic	normal
III 21	10yo	ND	high arched	1+	3+	10yo	neurogenic	normal



	<b>Patient III16</b>	<b>Patient II10</b>	<b>Patient III7</b>
Gender, age	Female, 8 yo	Female, 46 yo	Male, 5 yo
Development	Normal, walked at 15 months		Hip dysplasia at birth. Walked at 18 months with frequent falls.
Neurological examination	Waddling gait, frequent falls, difficulties for climbing stairs and long walks. Positive Gower's sign. Bilateral flat feet hyperlaxity of ankles. Mild leg muscles atrophy. Decreased knee and ankle reflexes. No Babinsky, no ankle clonus. Mild intention tremor of the hands. No intellectual disability.	Mild limitation of walking distance. Thighs and legs muscle wasting. Brisk knee and ankle reflexes with bilateral ankle clonus. Normal superficial sensation at the lower limbs. Decreased distal vibratory sensation at the lower limbs. No upper limbs weakness or atrophy. No intellectual disability.	Unable to run. Difficulties for climbing stairs, rising from sitting on the floor and walking on heels. Bilateral flat feet, ankle valgus and Achilles tendon stiffness. Buttocks, thighs and legs muscle wasting. Brisk knee and ankle reflexes with bilateral ankle clonus. No Babinsky or Rossolimo sign. Learning difficulties.
Electrophysiological studies	Lower limbs electromyography and conduction studies showed decreased or absent recruitment with large amplitude potentials. Normal motor and sensory nerve conduction velocities No spontaneous fibrillation recorded	Normal lower limbs electromyography and conduction studies Somatosensory evoked potentials abolished (provoked by lower limbs nerves stimulation)	Lower limbs electromyography and conduction studies showed decreased or absent recruitment with large amplitude potentials. Normal motor and sensory nerve conduction velocities
Imaging	ND	Brain and Spine MRI normal	ND