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Journal of Clinical Research and Reports

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Research Article

Boolean Algebra (Mathematical Logic) for Differential Diagnosis of Neurologic Disorders

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Received date: October 06, 2025; **Accepted date:** October 16, 2025; **Published date:** October 24, 2025

Citation: Gerhard Zugmaier and Franco Locaelli, (2025), Boolean Algebra (Mathematical Logic) for Differential Diagnosis of Neurologic Disorders, *J Clinical Research and Reports*, 21(3); **DOI:**10.31579/2690-1919/590

Abstract

Background: Using Boolean algebra for differential diagnosis of neurological disorders involves treating neurologic findings and disease entities such as Boolean variables and combining them via OR (V) or other logical operations.

Aim: To demonstrate how Boolean algebra (mathematical logic) and Boolean matrices can be applied to support differential diagnosis in neurology.

Results: Each neurologic finding was encoded as a Boolean variable (1 = present, 0 = absent). Boolean variables and Boolean matrices reflect mutual interdependencies of neurologic findings across diseases, enabling reverse inference (i.e., inferring possible diseases from a pattern of findings).

Conclusion: Boolean algebra offers a formal, rigorous framework to represent and manipulate differential diagnostic relationships in neurology; it may complement clinical reasoning and computational decision support.

Key Words: boolean algebra; matrix; neurologic disorders; differential diagnosis

Introduction

Differential diagnosis in neurology often relies on the recognition of overlapping symptom complexes. Traditional methods are largely heuristic, narrative, or algorithmic. However, representing findings and diseases in a formal logical or algebraic framework can offer clarity, consistency, and computer-assisted inference.

Boolean algebra (mathematical logic) provides a natural way to model binary phenomena (present vs absent, yes vs no). Boolean algebra was first formalized by George Boole in the 19th century. A significantly changed version has since become foundational for computer science, switching theory, and medical decision modeling.[6,7] In medicine, Boolean algebra has been applied to laboratory diagnostics, oncology, and computational decision support.[8-10] Zugmaier and colleagues have demonstrated its utility in defining acute leukemias, stratifying risk in B-cell precursor acute lymphoblastic leukemia, supporting laboratory diagnostics, and grading immune therapy toxicities.[1-5]

In this manuscript we extend this approach into neurology: mapping neurologic findings into Boolean variables, constructing Boolean matrices linking findings to diseases, and demonstrating logical inversion to aid differential diagnosis.

Materials and Methods

The core mathematical methods follow the conventions of Boolean algebra and Boolean matrices, as detailed in earlier works.[1,3-5]

Symbols of Boolean Algebra

1. **Variables**
   Each Boolean variable can take one of two values: 1 or 0.
   - Value 1 = presence (true)
   - Value 0 = absence (false)
2. **Operations**
   - **Inclusive OR (addition):**
     Represented as a + b or a v b B. The result is 1 if at least one operand is 1; otherwise 0.
     Example: 1+0=1, 0+0=0.
   - **Equality:**
     A=B is correct (1) if both are equal; false (0) otherwise.

Multiple notations may be used: A+B, A ∨ B, "A OR B."

In this manuscript, "v" (or "+") represents OR, and "=" represents equivalence. For example:

Finding1 v Finding2 v Finding3 = disease does not define the disease strictly, but indicates that such findings suggest monitoring for the disease.

Boolean Matrix Addition (Logical OR)

In Boolean algebra, matrix "addition" is performed elementwise via OR. If AAA is a Boolean matrix, then:

A + A = A ∨ A = A

Thus, adding a Boolean matrix to itself yields the same matrix. This idempotent property ensures that repeated additions do not change results.

Terminology of neurologic findings was applied as described in "DeGowin's Diagnostic Examiantion" [12].

Results

Headache = arteriovenous malformation v hydrocephalus v pheochromocytoma v intracranial pressure ↑ v meningitis v encephalitis v rickettsia v sinusitis v otitis v mastoiditis v viral infections v parasites v giant cell arteritis v sarcoidosis v trauma v hypoxia v hypercapnia v hypoglycemia v alcohol/withdrawal v carbon monoxide v caffeine withdrawal v brain tumor/metastasis v stress v aneurysm v hemorrhage v thrombosis

Muscle weakness = porphyria v muscular dystrophy v paramyotonica congenita v cerebral palsy v hyperthyroidism v poliomyelitis v West Nile virus v Guillain-Barré syndrome v demyelinating polyneuropathy v myasthenia gravis v dermatomyositis v multiple sclerosis v vasculitis v trauma v copper↓ v potassium↑↓ v magnesium↑↓ v calcium↑↓ v epidural metastasis v hysteria v stroke v subdural/epidural bleeding

Seizures = hypoglycemia v idiopathic epilepsy v meningitis v encephalitis v brain abscess v neurocysticercosis v vasculitis v trauma v fever v withdrawal v amphetamines v cocaine v phencyclidine v theophylline v calcium↓ v uremia/liver failure/hypoxia v penicillin v brain tumor/metastasis v stroke v hemorrhage

Peripheral neuropathies = Charcot–Marie–Tooth disease v porphyria v Fabry disease v familial forms v diabetes mellitus v ICU neuropathy v leprosy v rabies v herpes zoster v vasculitis v SLE v amyloidosis v celiac disease v monoclonal gammopathy v trauma v vitamin B12↓ v copper↓ v vitamin B6↓ v metastasis v paraneoplastic

Dementia = Alzheimer disease v adrenoleukodystrophy v Huntington disease v lipopolysaccharidosis v Wilson disease v mitochondrial disease v trisomy 21 v hypothyroidism v Addison v Cushing v hyper/hypoparathyroidism v Pick disease v Lewy body dementia v progressive supranuclear palsy v limbic encephalitis v HIV encephalopathy v syphilis v prion disease v progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy v Whipple disease v vasculitis v sclerosing panencephalitis v sarcoidosis v alcohol/thiamine↓/niacin↓ v uremia/liver failure/aluminum v trauma/metastasis/brain tumor v Parkinson v schizophrenia v Binswanger disease

Examples of logical reversals:

- Trauma = headache v muscle weakness v seizures v neuropathy v dementia
- Encephalitis = seizures v dementia
- Porphyria = muscle weakness v neuropathy v dementia

Discussion

This work demonstrates how Boolean algebra and Boolean matrices can formalize the mapping between neurologic findings and etiologies.

1. **Idempotence and consistency:** Because A+A=A repeated evidence does not inflate results. [6,7]
2. **Scalability and extension:** Boolean frameworks can be expanded with AND, NOT, and implication, paralleling expert systems in medicine. [8,9] Zugmaier adapted these approaches in hematology and oncology. [1,3]
3. **Precedent in medicine:** Boolean logic underlies early diagnostic expert systems such as MYCIN[8] and continues to be used in decision support. [1-5,9,15]
4. **Advantages vs limitations:** Advantages include clarity and computational tractability. Limitations include binary oversimplification, absence of severity grading, and lack of probabilistic weighting. [8,10]
5. **Future directions:** Combining Boolean frameworks with fuzzy logic and probabilistic models could enhance their applicability. [9,11]

Conclusion

Boolean algebra provides a rigorous framework to codify neurologic differential diagnoses. When combined with clinical judgment, probabilistic methods, and modern decision-support systems, it may improve diagnostic consistency and computational inference.[1-11]

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DOI:10.31579/2690-1919/590