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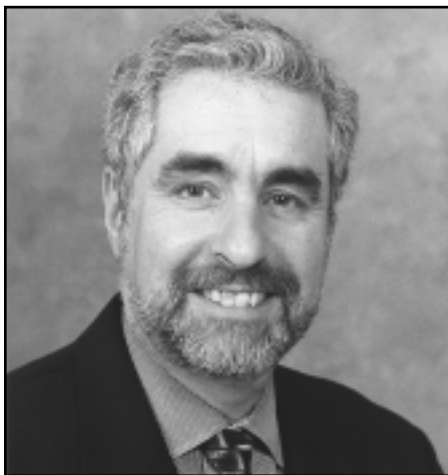


CONNECTION

Winter 2000

Alzheimer's Disease: New Developments, New Hope

Anyone who has watched a beloved family member or friend steadily deteriorate from Alzheimer's disease knows how devastating this illness can be. An estimated 5 to 10 percent of 65-year-olds and at least 30 percent of people aged 80 fall victim to it. As the baby boom



Dr. William Jagust's Family Caregiver Alliance Conference Presentation "New Directions-Current Research and Approaches to Dementia" <http://www.caregiver.org> (webcast)

generation ages and the impact on our society increases, the search for a cure has never been more pressing. And never more hopeful.

Three medications have now been FDA-approved for the treatment of Alzheimer's. All work by increasing the availability of acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter essential for nerve-to-nerve

communication within the brain. These medications, known as cholinesterase inhibitors, act by slowing acetylcholine's breakdown in the brain.

The three medications, tacrine (Cognex), donepezil (Aricept) and the newly approved rivastigmine (Exelon), have made significant improvements in people's lives. They increase mental acuity, make Alzheimer's patients less apathetic, and in many cases, they even enhance day-to-day functioning.

Unfortunately however, these medications merely postpone, rather than completely stave off, the devastating progression of Alzheimer's disease. They can make an important difference in keeping a person at home and functioning longer, but they are not a cure.

The good news is that Alzheimer's disease is a high

priority for medical researchers and is now being investigated on many fronts. One study conducted by the National Institute on Aging is looking at individuals with mild cognitive impairment (MCI), people who have noticeable memory lapses but are able to function well. MCI is believed to be a "pre-Alzheimer's" condition in some patients. Many of these individuals are expected to progress to true Alzheimer's disease, in which many aspects of thinking deteriorate.

Study participants at multiple sites throughout the country, including at UC Davis, will take either donepezil (one of the medications used for Alzheimer's) and vitamin E (which has been demonstrated to have beneficial effects on Alzheimer's patients) or a placebo (an inactive pill) over a three-year period. This important study will potentially determine effective methods to prevent or delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease in people at the highest risk.

Another study, which is being undertaken at UC Davis Medical Center as part of a national clinical trial, examines the role of ginkgo biloba, a plant extract, in preventing the memory problems of MCI and Alzheimer's disease in healthy older people. UC Davis Medical Center is also involved in a study examining the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which have been shown in some studies to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease. For information on this study contact: (916) 734-4636.

In recent years, major breakthroughs have occurred in medical science's knowledge of the molecular biology and chemistry of Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's patients develop characteristic changes in their brain that are evident microscopically. Neurons are lost and unusual features appear, including fibrous tangles inside neurons and "plaques" of abnormal proteins. This knowledge is enabling pharmaceutical companies to specifically target new drugs aimed at preventing these processes.

Medications that prevent plaque formation are now being investigated in animals and are very close to clinical trials for safety and efficacy in people. They have the potential to be the first medications that will offer a true cure for Alzheimer's.

Numerous studies are ongoing across the nation, and anyone who is interested in participating should keep abreast

of developments. Depending on the study, Alzheimer's patients, people with memory problems, and healthy older people may be participants. People of minority groups are especially encouraged to participate, as they are often underrepresented in research studies and may show important differences in drug effects.

To find out about trials, contact the National Institute on Aging at (800) 438-4380 or check out their Web site at

<http://www.alzheimers.org>. This site allows you to search a database of clinical trials on Alzheimer's disease and dementia currently in progress at centers throughout the United States. For information about participating in UC Davis trials, call the UC Davis Alzheimer's Disease Center at (916) 734-5496.

Dr. Jagust is a neurologist and the director of the UC Davis Alzheimer's Disease Center.

What are the Early Stage Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease?

Alzheimer's disease affects people in different ways. Individuals will differ according to the symptoms they experience and the way the disease progresses. However, the general course of the disease is often divided into stages (early, middle and



late) based upon memory functioning, overall thinking ability, day-to-day abilities to care for yourself, and behavior. Long-term memory (i.e., childhood and early adulthood) is usually the least affected. The following is a list of areas that may

become increasingly difficult for someone who is in the early stage of Alzheimer's disease. This list is intended to help you identify potential areas of difficulty in order to plan for future changes. You may begin noticing changes in the following areas:

- Memory for recent events: remembering appointments, details of a recent conversation, and names.
- Carrying out tasks with multiple steps: managing money and balancing your checkbook, taking medications, shopping and cooking.
- Decision-making and problem solving: making quick decisions when there is an emergency, such as responding to a flood in your home.
- Spatial ability and orientation: following a map or following directions, judging the distance of objects while driving, and feeling lost in familiar environments.
- Language: finding the right word, understanding what you have read, and writing.
- Behavior and/or mood: loss of interest in new projects, withdrawing in social situations, feelings of anxiety and depression. Keep in mind that symptoms of anxiety and depression are often treatable; speak with your physician if these feelings arise.

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A HEARTFELT "THANK YOU" TO THE VALLEJO SONS OF ITALY!

The UC Davis Alzheimer's Disease center is grateful to the Sons of Italy Virgilio Lodge No. 1586 and the Beatrice Portinari Lodge No. 1626 for their generous donation of \$8760.00 to support the ongoing research and respite patient care activities of the UC Davis Alzheimer's Disease Center in Sacramento. This generous donation, split between the two Lodges was a gift in honor of Emma DeSantos who is living with Alzheimer's Disease on behalf of her husband Peter DeSantos, a State Officer for the Sons of Italy. Nearly every member of the Vallejo Sons of Italy has been touched by Alzheimer's Disease and is well aware of the need for continued research and caregiving issues required for this disease. This unexpected gift of \$8760.00 and the over \$30,000 which this generous organization has donated to the UC Davis Alzheimer's Disease Center during the past 8 years has provided tremendous support and demonstrated the Sons of Italy's commitment to the many research and client education programs of the UC Davis Alzheimer's Disease Center.



Shown Left to Right: Peter DeSantos, William Jagust, M.D., Bruno Marnini, Dan Mungas, Ph.D., Evelyn Fox



Contributions

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In memory of:

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Welcome Dr. Charles DeCarli



Dr. Charles DeCarli is an Associate Professor of Neurology at the University of California at Davis and the Associate Director of the UC Davis Alzheimer's Disease Center. After completing medical training at George Washington University, Dr. DeCarli received his neurology residency at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, New York. He then joined the National Institutes of Health, where he established his research in the Laboratory of Neurosciences.

Dr. DeCarli's research at NIH focused on understanding the relationship between brain structure and function in aging and Alzheimer's disease. He gained extensive expertise in the use of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and positron emission topography (PET). He also developed QUANTA, a software program that quantifies changes in brain morphology associated with normal aging and dementing illnesses.

In 1996, Dr. DeCarli joined the faculty at Kansas University where he directed the Alzheimer's Disease Center, taught residents and medical students, and directed the KUMC Alzheimer's Disease and Memory Disorders Clinic. He led an active dementia research program that encompassed both basic science and clinical investigations.

In 2000, Dr. DeCarli joined the faculty at the University of California at Davis where he is the Associate Director of the Alzheimer's Disease Center and Co-Director of the Imaging in Dementia and Aging (IDeA) Laboratory. He works closely with Dr. William Jagust, the Director, Dr. Bruce Reed and Dr. Dan Mungas to understand the various factors that influence the presentation and progression of Alzheimer's Disease.

Widely recognized for his expertise in neuroimaging, Dr. DeCarli has received multiple grants to investigate MRI and genetic precursors of dementia as well as cardiovascular risk factors associated with dementia and stroke. He serves on NIH scientific review committees and frequently presents his research at national and international conferences on Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia and neuroimaging.

Discovering Ways of Coping

Symptoms during the early stages can be challenging, both for the person with Alzheimer's and his or her family. The following is a list of things to do or ways of thinking about the disease that have been helpful to others living with Alzheimer's disease. Some of these suggestions may be helpful to you as well.

- Educate yourself about the disease and resources in the community.
- Maintain an open mind and positive attitude—focus on your present abilities.
- Know that there are many ways in which you can continue a meaningful and productive life.
- Be patient with yourself.
- Continue to explore ways to fulfill your needs for intimacy and closeness. The desire for intimate and close relationships with others continues throughout the disease.
- Exercise can contribute to good physical health and coordination, and can reduce stress and frustration. See your physician for an exercise program that will best fit your needs.
- Find productive ways to release anger and frustration—talk with a close friend, a counselor experienced with Alzheimer's disease, or join a support group especially for people with the disease.
- Use visible and/or accessible reminders—write notes to yourself, leave messages on your answering machine, or set the alarm on a watch as a reminder about an upcoming appointment.
- Know that you are not identified only as a person with Alzheimer's disease—focus on your special personal attributes and inner qualities, such as integrity, kindness, humor.
- Become an advocate for yourself and other individuals with Alzheimer's disease. Write letters and make phone calls to local and state representatives or become involved in a research program.

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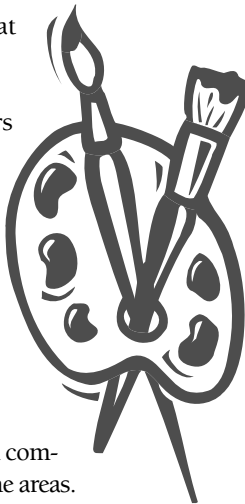
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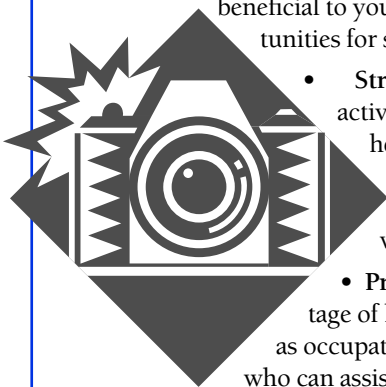
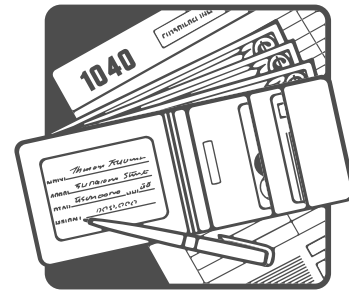
What's in Your Community?

There are a variety of community resources that can provide you and your family with support and assistance. Some of these programs primarily provide information on specific issues while others provide help with the emotional impact of the disease.

- **Support groups and counseling services:** Support groups can be primarily discussion-oriented or offer a variety of activities including outings and creative projects. Caregiver support groups are also available in the community for family members and friends.
- **Volunteer programs:** Volunteer workshops and community volunteer programs are available in some areas.
- **Artistic programs:** Expressing yourself through work in clay, paint or photography, for example, may be very beneficial to you and can provide you with opportunities for self-expression.



- **Legal and financial assistance:** Completing a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care and Durable Power of Attorney for Finances may be important initial steps. Check with your local Caregiver Resource Center (in California) or chapter of the Alzheimer's Association for appropriate referrals.
- **Care management:** A care manager experienced in the field of Alzheimer's disease can provide education, assistance with transitions, emotional support and guidance in locating and coordinating community resources.



- **Structured day programs:** Adult day activity programs (both social and health oriented) provide activities such as art therapy, exercise, community outings and assistance with physical health needs.
- **Professional assistance:** Take advantage of health-care professionals such as occupational and physical therapists who can assist with maintaining your physical strength and coordination.



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COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



UC Davis Alzheimer's Disease Center	916-734-5496 www.alzheimer.ucdavis.edu/ADC
Alzheimer's Aid Society	1-800-540-3340
Alzheimer's Association/Greater Sacramento	1-800-660-1993 www.sacalz.org
Alzheimer's Association/Greater SF Bay Area	1-800-660-1993 www.alzsf.org
Del Oro Caregivers Resource Center	1-800-635-0220 www.deloro.org
Family Caregiver Alliance	1-800-445-8106 www.caregivers.org

"Coming of Age"

Community Lecture Series



...towards a
society
for all ages ...

The UC Davis Center for Healthy Aging hosts an ongoing free educational lecture series "Coming of Age" on the first and third Tuesday evenings of each month at the UCDMC Cancer Center Auditorium in Sacramento from 6:30-8:00 p.m. These lectures feature speakers from UC Davis Health Systems addressing topics of Alzheimer's Disease, aging and

health, caregiver concerns, and men and women's health issues. For information about the series and to sign up for the mailing list, contact 916-734-4767.



Upcoming Community Events

- March 1 "Celebrating the Person Within"
Alzheimer's Association Spring Conference
Sacramento Convention Center
800-660-1993
- March 6 "Alzheimer's Disease in the New Millennium"
William Jagust, MD
6:30 p.m., UCDMC Cancer Center
Auditorium 916-734-4767
- April 7 "Dementia, Depression and Caregiving"
Del Oro Caregivers Conference
Placerville Senior Center 800-635-0220
- May 12 "The Caregiver Journey"
UC Davis Annual Community Caregivers'
Conference 916-734-4767
- October Northern California Regional Aging Summit
Sacramento Convention Center
916-734-4767

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Charles DeCarli, M.D., Associate Director
Rebecca Hughes Kovacs, Administrative Coordinator

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Bruce R. Reed, Ph.D., Co-Director

Education and Information Transfer Core:

Dan Mungas, Ph.D.

Neuropathology Core:

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The UC Davis Alzheimer's Disease Center includes members of the following UC Davis departments: Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Neurology and Pathology

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