ABOUT ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

- Dementia is a general term for disorders involving a decline in memory, thinking, judgment, and learning ability. Although physicians can almost always determine whether a person has dementia, there is no single test that can show whether a person has Alzheimer’s or is at risk for the disease.

- Alzheimer’s disease is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States, with death usually coming as a result of secondary infections such as pneumonia and bladder infections common in incapacitated patients, or from the inability to follow medical instructions.

- Those with Alzheimer’s may, at first, notice mild confusion and difficulty remembering. Eventually, they may fail to even recognize important people in their lives and undergo dramatic personality changes.

- Medication and management strategies may temporarily improve the symptoms of the disease, allowing patients to maximize their ability to function and maintain their independence for a while longer. However, there is presently no cure for the disease.

VA RESEARCH ON ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE: OVERVIEW

- VA researchers are looking at ways to delay or possibly prevent the onset of Alzheimer’s disease. They are also developing new ways to detect the disease, to understand its connection to other illnesses and injuries, and to support those who have the difficult responsibility of caring for Veterans with Alzheimer’s.

- Some VA researchers are working on potential drug therapies for prevention and treatment of Alzheimer’s. Others are exploring the genetic and environmental causes of the disease, or studying the best ways to provide long-term care for patients with Alzheimer’s.

- The Alzheimer’s Disease Neuroimaging Initiative, led by VA researchers, is making it easier for clinicians to diagnose Alzheimer’s disease in its early stages.

- VA’s Center for Imaging of Neurodegenerative Disease is devoted exclusively to magnetic resonance imaging of the human brain, and is homing in on clues regarding Alzheimer’s disease and other diseases involving the progressive loss of brain function.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

2004 - Took on leadership of a nationwide study to identify brain changes linked to Alzheimer’s disease

2006 - Established the Center for Imaging of Neurodegenerative Diseases at the San Francisco VA, in collaboration with the Department of Defense

2011 - Demonstrated the effectiveness of an insulin-based treatment, using a special nasal delivery system, to possibly help ward off Alzheimer’s

2014 - Found that vitamin E, an inexpensive treatment, can significantly delay functional decline among patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer’s

2015 - Developed a simple blood test that can be used to predict the buildup of amyloid in the brain, an Alzheimer’s biomarker, with modest accuracy

RECENT STUDIES: SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

- Compounds that inhibit two cellular proteins can help remove the toxic plaques found in the brain of mice with...
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