

Medical Document Analysis Report

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Introduction

Alzheimer's Disease: Unraveling the Mystery 8 Introduction Unraveling the Mystery Thinking about Alzheimer's disease leads to questions such as: Will I get it? What causes it? What can be done to cure it or prevent it? Scientists ask the same types of questions, and this booklet describes their search for answers. It is written for people with AD, their family members, friends, and caregivers, and anyone else interested in AD. Unraveling the Mystery has two sections. Part 1 gives readers the basics – it's a "walking tour" through the brain. Illustrations with text show what a healthy brain looks like and how it works, and what happens in a brain affected by AD. Part 2 talks about current research and the advances that are bringing us closer to ways of managing, and eventually defeating, AD. Throughout, terms in bold are defined in a glossary at the end of the booklet. The end of the booklet also includes a list of publications and resources that family mem-

explains the drug development process. The site also provides links to other useful websites with related information. For additional information, visit the clinical trials websites of the Alzheimer's Association www.alz.org/ResourceCenter/ByTopic/Research.htm and the National Institutes of Health www.clinicaltrials.gov/.

ferent groups of people. This approach has often provided clues as to why some people get a disease and others don't. Another way is to study one group of people over time. The notion here is that data gathered over a period of years will reveal important clues about the origins of the disease under investigation. The knowledge gained also may lay the foundation for future treatment or prevention strategies. The Framingham Heart Study is one famous example of this kind of study. It has followed two generations of Massachusetts residents for 50 years, and its findings have revolutionized the way we think about, treat, and prevent heart disease. the Human Side of AD Research (Continued on next page)

690 Market Street, Suite 600 San Francisco, CA 94104 415-434-3388 Website: www.caregiver.org National Institute on Aging (NIA). Part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the NIA is the Federal government's lead agency for research on AD. NIA

also offers information about health and aging, including the Age Page series and the NIA Exercise Kit, which contains an 80-page exercise guide and 48-minute closed-captioned video. Caregivers can find many Age Pages on the website. National Institute on Aging Information Center PO Box 8057 Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057 1-800-222-2225 1-800-222-4225 (TTY) Website: www.nia.nih.gov National Library of Medicine. Part of NIH, the National Library of Medicine is the world's largest medical library with 6 million items, including books, journals, technical reports, manuscripts, microfilms, photographs and images. A large searchable health information database of biomedical journals, called MED- LINE/PubMed is accessible via the Internet. A

Alzheimer's Disease: Unraveling the Mystery 31 theSearchforCauses One of the most important parts of unrav- eling the AD mystery is finding out what causes the disease. What makes the disease process begin in the first place? What makes it worse over time? Why does the number of people with the disease increase with age? Why does one person develop it and another remain healthy? Some diseases, like measles or pneumonia, have clear-cut causes. They can be prevented with vaccines or cured with antibiotics. Others, such as diabetes or arthritis, develop when genetic, lifestyle, and environmental fac- tors work together to cause a disease process to start. The importance of each one of these fac- tors may be different for each individual. AD fits into this second group of diseases. We don't yet fully understand what causes AD, but we know it develops because of a complex series of events that take place in the brain over a long period of time. Many studies are

Clinical Findings

parts of the study. What happens during a trial? If participants agree to join the study and the screening process shows they're a good match, they have a "base- line" visit with the study staff. This visit generally involves a full physical exam and extensive cognitive and physical tests. This gives the study team information against which to measure future mental and physical changes. Participants also receive the test drug or treat- ment. As the study progresses, participating patients and family members usually must follow strict medication or treatment instructions and keep detailed records of symptoms. Every so often, participants visit the clinic or research center to have physical and cognitive exams, give blood and urine samples, and talk with study staff. These visits allow the investigators to assess the effects of the test drug or treatment, see how the disease is pro- gressing, and see how the participant and the caregiver are doing.

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the Human Side of AD Research (Continued on next page)

this knowledge, we have rapidly improved our ability to accurately diagnose AD. We are still some distance from the ultimate goal – a reliable, valid, inexpensive, and early diagnostic marker – but experienced physicians now can diagnose AD with up to 90 percent accuracy. Early diagnosis has several advantages. For example, many conditions cause symptoms that mimic those of Alzheimer's disease. Finding out early that the problem isn't AD but is something else can spur people into Alzheimer's Disease: Unraveling the Mystery 37

The Religious Orders Study and the Nun Study: Lives of Service Continue Even After Death One way that scientists have tried to unravel the mystery of AD and other complex diseases, like heart disease or cancer, is to compare the characteristics, lifestyles, and disease rates of different groups of people. This approach has often provided clues as to why some people get a disease and others don't. Another way is to study one group of people over time. The

be tested in Phase II and Phase III clinical trials. These trials involve larger numbers of people over longer periods of time. In these trials, the study team wants to know whether the treatment is safe and effective and what side effects it might have. After these phases are complete and investigators are satisfied that the treatment is safe and effective, the study team may submit its data to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for approval. The FDA reviews the data and decides whether to approve the drug or treatment for use in patients. What happens when a person signs up for a clinical trial? First it is important to learn about the study. Study staff explain the trial in detail to potential research participants and describe possible risks and benefits. Staff also talk about participants' rights as research volunteers, including their right to leave the study at any time. Participants and their family members are entitled to have this the Human Side of AD Research

Alzheimer's Disease: Unraveling the Mystery 41

Current Tools for Diagnosing AD A definitive diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease is still only possible after death, during an autopsy, when the plaques and tangles can actually be seen. But with the tools now available, experienced physicians can be pretty confident about making an accurate diagnosis in a living person. Here's how they do it. They take a detailed patient history, including:

- G A description of how and when symptoms developed
- G A description of the patient's and his or her family's overall medical condition and history
- G An assessment of the patient's emotional state and living environment

They get information from family members or close friends:

- G People close to the patient can provide valuable insights into how behavior and personality have changed; many times, family and friends know some-

thing is wrong even before changes are evident on tests. They conduct physical and neurological examina-

Summary

This document provides information regarding Alzheimer's Disease (AD) research, resources, and clinical trials. It highlights the importance of early and accurate AD diagnosis, noting that experienced physicians can diagnose AD with up to 90% accuracy, which allows for timely intervention and differentiation from other conditions mimicking AD.

Several key organizations are identified as resources for information and support. The National Library of Medicine (NLM), a part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is the world's largest medical library, offering access to biomedical journals through MEDLINE/PubMed and consumer health information via MEDLINEplus. The National Institute on Aging (NIA), also part of NIH, is the lead federal agency for AD research and provides information on health and aging. Partnership for Caring (PFC) is a nonprofit organization focused on improving end-of-life care, offering information on living wills and medical powers of attorney, as well as education and consultation services.

The document emphasizes the value of clinical trials in AD research, detailing the phases of clinical trials (Phase II and Phase III) and the process of participant enrollment, including baseline visits, cognitive and physical testing, and regular follow-up assessments. It explains the importance of randomized assignment to test groups (receiving the experimental drug) or control groups (receiving a placebo or different drug) and the concept of "masking" to minimize bias.

The document also addresses considerations for individuals contemplating participation in clinical trials, including the importance of understanding potential risks and benefits, the right to withdraw at any time, and the uncertainties associated with participation. It highlights the importance of ongoing communication with study staff to address concerns and frustrations.

Finally, the document mentions research methodologies, such as comparing different groups of people and studying groups over time, exemplified by the Framingham Heart Study, to identify clues about disease origins and inform treatment and prevention strategies. It also acknowledges setbacks in research while emphasizing the valuable information gained and the ongoing pursuit of alternative strategies.