

## Volunteers Needed for Alzheimer's Research

The University of Michigan, home to the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (MADRC), is looking for volunteers to take part in a variety of research studies.

### *Unlocking the mysteries behind Alzheimer's disease...*

The Michigan Memory and Aging Project (M-MAP), is a long-term observational study, the largest study conducted through the MADRC. It is designed to help researchers gain an understanding of how changes in memory and thinking occur as people age. Information will be gained about people who have early Alzheimer's disease, mild cognitive impairment (memory and thinking problems not yet meeting criteria to diagnose Alzheimer's disease), and normal controls (people with no significant problems with their thinking and memory). Because the study is longitudinal, taking place over an extended period of time, researchers can study how AD affects people by "mapping" its progression. Vital information gathered over the last 15 years from this study has allowed researchers to gain new insights into Alzheimer's disease. Currently, over 1,000 people have participated. However, a recent decline in the number of people participating in research nationwide has made the need for volunteers even more critical.

Once enrolled in the study, participants receive a comprehensive evaluation that includes a physical exam, a neurological exam, memory testing and other additional tests. Participants are monitored by research staff regularly and are seen by the study physician, once every year. Participants and their families also maintain regular contact with dementia experts associated with the study that can provide a wide range of information, support, and referrals to other services.

If you would like to learn more about the M-MAP, please contact Nakia Johnson, MADRC Recruitment Coordinator at (734) 615-8462 or email [neuro-ADresearch@med.umich.edu](mailto:neuro-ADresearch@med.umich.edu).

### ***Searching for effective treatments...***

The University of Michigan is currently recruiting qualified participants for many different clinical trials in an effort to find better ways to diagnose and treat Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. Anyone who has been personally impacted by these devastating diseases knows how critical it is to find new and effective treatments. There are currently four drugs approved by the FDA for treatment of Alzheimer's disease and these drugs treat only the symptoms of the disease. Researchers have yet to find a treatment that attacks the underlying cause of AD. While exciting progress is being made on this front, more volunteers are needed to take part in research. If you are wondering what you can do to help, please consider volunteering for a study. Participants can take part in both the M-MAP and a clinical trial at the same time.

There are several clinical trials exploring new treatments for AD currently recruiting subjects at the University of Michigan.

**CLASP** (Cholesterol-Lowering Agent to Slow the Progression of Alzheimer's disease). This trial is investigating whether *Simvastatin* (a drug currently used to lower cholesterol levels) is also helpful in slowing the progression of Alzheimer's disease and improving quality of life. Previous studies have shown that cholesterol-lowering drugs (called statins), which lower the risk of heart disease, may also reduce the risk of nerve cell damage in people with mild to moderate AD. Participants must be age 50 or older, have a study partner that can accompany them to clinic visits, and should not be currently taking cholesterol-lowering drugs.

**VITAL** (Vitamins to slow Alzheimer's disease). People with AD have higher-than-normal levels of homocysteine in their blood. Homocysteine is an amino acid produced naturally in the body. Past studies have shown that high-dose vitamin supplements can lower homocysteine levels. Researchers are examining whether a regimen of vitamins B6, B12 and folate will slow the progression of AD. Participants must be 55 years or older, have mild to moderate AD and have a study partner who can accompany them to clinic visits.

**VALID** (Valproate in Dementia). One of the most challenging aspects of AD is the difficult behavior that often accompanies the disease. Some of the most common behavioral symptoms include agitation, anxiety, depression, delusions and wandering. This trial is exploring whether Valproate, an anti-seizure drug, is also effective in treating or even preventing difficult behaviors and in slowing disease progression in people with early stage Alzheimer's disease. Previous laboratory research has shown that Valproate interferes with the cell damage commonly seen in AD. Because it has been used for many years to treat seizures and, even behavioral problems in other diseases, much is already known about the drug's safety. Participants must be 55 years or older, diagnosed with probable AD, and have not experienced agitation or psychosis since the onset of AD.

**Rosiglitazone** is a drug currently used to treat diabetes. This trial uses brain imaging studies, known as Positron Emission Tomography (PET), to look at the effects of Rosiglitazone on the way the brain uses blood glucose in people with AD. Information from laboratory and human studies suggests that decreased glucose (sugar) use by the brain may affect thinking ability and memory in AD. Rosiglitazone is currently used to treat diabetes by helping to regulate blood sugar. Researchers are attempting to learn whether it will also improve sugar utilization in the brain and result in improved memory. Participants must be over age 50, have mild to moderate AD, have a permanent caregiver and have *not* been diagnosed with diabetes.

If you would like to learn more about any of these trials, please contact Joanne Lord, Clinical Research Coordinator at the U M Department of Neurology at (734) 647-7760 or [jllord@umich.edu](mailto:jllord@umich.edu).

People take part in research for many different reasons. Sometimes they hope to gain from new medications or procedures not available to the public, but most of the time they just want to help. Many patients realize that while these studies may be of limited help to them personally, the knowledge gained will help others in the future. For many, this vital contribution is a reward in itself.

*---Written by Martha Quinn (Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Research Center 4/05)*