UC San Diego Joins NIH-Supported Study to Find Earliest Changes in the Brain That May Lead to Alzheimer's Disease

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The Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC) at UC San Diego School of Medicine is conducting a clinical study examining the subtle changes that may take place in the brains of older people many years before overt symptoms of Alzheimer's disease (AD) appear. Researchers at the ADRC are specifically looking for people with the very earliest complaints of memory problems that affect their daily activities. The study will follow participants over time, using imaging techniques specifically developed to advance research into changes taking place in the structure and function of the living brain, as well as biomarker measures found in blood and cerebrospinal fluid.

"We cannot end this terrible disease unless we know more about it," said James Brewer, MD, PhD, associate professor of radiology and principal investigator for the UC San Diego study. "This is where amazing volunteers, their friends and their families can make the difference in our success."

Over 5.3 million people across the U.S. are suffering from AD, and every 70 seconds, another person develops this devastating disease. In California alone, 588, 208 are currently living with AD, making finding a cure a pressing need in our local communities.

The National Institute on Aging (NIA), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the NIH Office of the Director are funding the $24 million, two-year Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative Grand Opportunity (ADNI-GO) national study. Researchers seek to recruit local volunteers between the ages of 55 and 90 who may be transitioning from normal cognitive aging to an early stage of amnestic mild cognitive impairment (aMCI) – a condition that may progress to Alzheimer's disease – but are otherwise healthy. In addition to UC San Diego, there are 50 other sites across the United States participating in the study.

"ADNI-GO is part of an ongoing effort to establish imaging and fluid biomarker measures of Alzheimer's disease from the onset of mild symptoms to the advanced stages of the disease process," said NIA Director Richard J. Hodes, MD. "By advancing understanding of the full

spectrum of the disease, we'll be better able to identify who is at risk, track progression of the disorder, and devise measurements to test the effectiveness of potential prevention or treatment strategies."

The grant expands the efforts of the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI), a research partnership supported primarily by the NIA with private-sector support through the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (FNIH). ADNI began in 2004 to establish neuroimaging and biomarker measures to track the changes taking place in the brains of 800 older people either free of symptoms or diagnosed with late-stage MCI and early Alzheimer's disease. ADNI is led by the Northern California Institute for Research and Education, a nonprofit foundation affiliated with the San Francisco VA Medical Center. Michael Weiner, MD, is the principal investigator.

The new ADNI-GO effort enables researchers to continue studying nearly 500 of the original ADNI volunteers, including those in San Diego, while expanding the study to include the new participants with early amnestic MCI. All participants will undergo cognitive testing, neuroimaging to measure changes in function and structure in the brain, and blood tests to measure changes in biomarkers. Newly enrolled participants and some original study volunteers will undergo a lumbar puncture to collect cerebrospinal fluids.

To volunteer or learn more about the study, contact Helen Vanderswag at UCSD's Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer's Disease Research Center at 858-622-5800 or 858-622-5805, or email hvanderswag@ucsd.edu

Volunteers must speak English or Spanish and have a person willing to assist them during at least five clinic visits and with telephone contacts from researchers.

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About ADNI: In addition to NIA, the original ADNI study involved other federal partners: the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering, also part of NIH, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, another agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Media Contact: Debra Kain, 619-543-6163, ddkain@ucsd.edu

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