

Memory Matters



A publication of the Johns Hopkins Memory & Alzheimer's Treatment Center and Alzheimer's Disease Research Center

Fall/Winter 2023

New Treatments for Early Alzheimer's Disease

This past year is considered by many as a watershed moment in the development of treatments for Alzheimer's disease (AD). In July 2023, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave full approval to Lecanemab (brand name Leqembi), based on clinical trial data indicating that patients receiving the drug demonstrated benefits to both cognition and functional activities of daily living.

This medication is novel because it targets and removes amyloid plaques – one of the hallmark brain changes of AD. In the Lecanemab clinical trial, the amyloid plaque level was reduced to almost normal levels, which is why some researchers consider this treatment to be 'disease modifying' (*see image at right*).

Findings for a second medication that focused on removing amyloid from the brain – Donanemab – were published in July. This drug also showed differences in cognitive and functional activities compared to those not taking the drug. FDA approval for Donanemab is expected later this year.

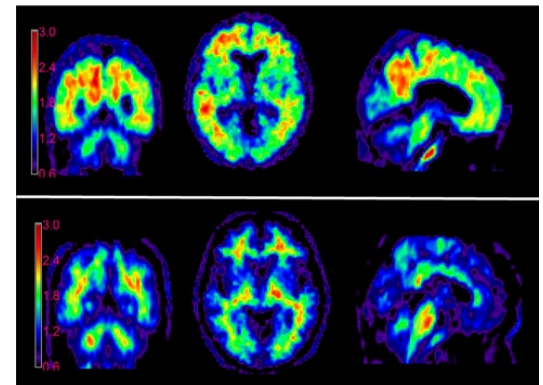
In 2021, the FDA provided accelerated approval for Aducanumab (brand name Aduhelm). This approval has, however, been controversial since the clinical benefits were only evident in a subset of participants examined (rather than all participants). It is important to note that this drug has not received full FDA approval.

Clinical trial data from these drugs, referred to as monoclonal antibodies, show that some individuals receiving these treatments develop side effects. The most concerning are amyloid-related imaging abnormalities, or ARIA, such as small hemorrhages in the brain and brain swelling. These abnormalities tend to be more common in individuals with specific genetic characteristics, which is why most physicians recommend testing for these genetic factors before starting treatment.



Medicare has agreed to cover the cost of Lecanemab based on its full FDA approval. However, there will be out-of-pocket expenses that may be considerable. Individuals considering these medications should discuss the risks and benefits of these treatments, insurance coverage, and the out-of-pocket costs with their clinician.

Since the clinical benefit of these drugs is considered by most clinicians to be modest, researchers continue to seek improved treatments for AD. This includes determining whether these treatments have similar efficacy and safety in all racial and ethnic groups.

For additional information, view our prior event recordings at tinyurl.com/TreatmentPresentations.



Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scan images show brains that are positive (top) and negative (bottom) for amyloid accumulation.

  **Get Social With Us!** Follow us on Facebook (JHMemoryandAging) and Twitter (@JH_Memory_Aging) for the latest information, resources, events and research opportunities related to healthy aging, memory loss and dementia.

Please share *Memory Matters* with your family and friends! Download electronic copies from the ADRC website – alzresearch.org/newsletter. To request extra print copies, please contact **Ashley Scott** at **410-550-2281** or ascott41@jhmi.edu.

ANNUAL MEDICARE WELLNESS VISIT: BE PROACTIVE WITH YOUR HEALTH

Medicare has covered the cost of an annual wellness visit for more than 10 years, but not everyone takes advantage of this option. This visit includes a questionnaire that helps your physician understand your health, as well as routine measurements, a review of medical and family history and current prescriptions, and more. It also provides an opportunity to discuss medical concerns with your physician – including any concerns you may have about changes in memory and thinking abilities – and address questions about medications, supplements, and lifestyle activities or changes. For Medicare recipients, an annual wellness visit is included with Part B coverage and is billed as a separate type of visit than a physical exam.

The goal is to allow your physician to get an overall impression of your health and cognitive status, identify any problems, and develop a personalized prevention plan as early as possible. Identifying early symptoms of cognitive impairment is particularly important because some causes of cognitive change are treatable. More important, early diagnosis may lead to more appropriate care.

Learn more at [medicare.gov/coverage/yearly-wellness-visits](https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/yearly-wellness-visits).

Make the Most of Your Wellness Visit

Ensure your physician accepts Medicare and ask about costs associated with additional tests or services that you may receive (e.g., blood tests)

Bring detailed medical history notes and a list of all medications and supplements that you are taking

Prepare a list of questions you want answered during your appointment, including health issues that may need additional attention, and communicate these priorities to your physician

Consider including a family member in your appointment, for additional insight or to remind you of concerns or questions you may have

HEALTH RESEARCH EMPHASIZES SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS

Many factors in people's daily lives affect brain health, including risk for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. To better understand this, researchers are placing increased emphasis on studying social and cultural factors, particularly when exploring health disparities in underserved communities.

Examining how social and cultural factors (e.g., social network, spirituality, structural and institutional racism) contribute to the health status of Black men is a specific focus of **Dr. Roland Thorpe, Jr.**, professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Some of his recent research suggests that social adversity – including exposure to chronic stress, lower levels of social support and early life discrimination – is associated with faster biological aging, as reflected by markers of general health in adulthood (cholesterol, blood pressure and glucose).

These and other findings have motivated Dr. Thorpe's *Black Men's Health Project*, which focuses on the health status and social experiences of Black men. This project seeks to fully understand how factors such as stress, religion, spirituality, racism and segregation contribute to the health and mortality of Black men nationwide. The ultimate goal is to develop strategies that improve health outcomes.

“Improving the health and well-being of Black men in the United States is critical to extending the life expectancy of this group,” says Dr. Thorpe.

To learn more the Black Men's Health Project, visit blackmenshealthproject.org.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Cadeesha Graham, BS

Senior Research Coordinator, Johns Hopkins Alzheimer's Disease Research Center

Cadeesha joined the Clinical Core of the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC) in 2022. Her responsibilities include overseeing the Diverse Vascular Contributions to Cognitive Impairment and Dementia Study (referred to as Diverse VCID), which is a nationwide study designed to understand how vascular changes cause brain injury and cognitive decline, particularly in racially diverse communities.

What led you to pursue this position with the ADRC?

I was motivated to pursue this position for personal reasons, as my grandmother was recently diagnosed with dementia. I felt that this position would give me better insight into the ways in which dementia affects individuals, and provide an opportunity to make an impact on the lives of people living with Alzheimer's and related dementias.

Do you have any specific initiatives that you would like to pursue in order to help increase participation in clinical research studies on aging and memory loss?

I am excited to play a more active role in community outreach. I feel that a lot of individuals do not know about the about the research studies available through the ADRC, and that getting involved may help others with cognitive impairment.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Walk to End Alzheimer's

Join our team – Johns Hopkins Aging and Alzheimer's Centers

Oct. 28, 2023

Hunt Valley Town Centre

118 Shawan Rd., Cockeysville, MD 21030

Info./Register: tinyurl.com/JHWalkTeam2023

Community Forum on Healthy Aging (virtual)

Nov. 13 & 14, 2023

5 to 7 p.m.

Info./Register: cevens20@jhmi.edu

Journey to Hope Conference (hybrid)

Nov. 18, 2023

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Info./Register: 410-550-7211 or anelso18@jhmi.edu

Pythias A. & Virginia I. Jones African American Community Forum on Memory Loss

Dec. 9, 2023

8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Morgan State University

1700 E. Cold Spring Lane, Baltimore, MD 21251

Info./Register: 800-272-3900

Holistic Health Seminar on Memory Loss (virtual)

June 1, 2024

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Info.: 410-550-2281

ADRC Conference on Aging and Dementia

June 11, 2024

9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Owens Auditorium

Bunting-Blaustein Cancer Research Building

1550 Orleans St., Baltimore MD 21287

Info.: alzresearch.org/education-programs

Purple Weekend: Faith-based Alzheimer's Awareness

Faith communities help raise awareness about Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and connect members with information about services and resources, by holding "Purple Weekend" events. This includes events held during a religious gathering (held at any time throughout the year) that provide information about Alzheimer's disease and related disorders.

Info.: 800-272-3900 or mataylor@alz.org

RESEARCH STUDIES SEEKING PARTICIPANTS



Help us learn more about healthy aging and the diagnosis and treatment of memory problems by volunteering for a research study. Each study has different eligibility requirements. Procedures, length of study and compensation vary.

- **Memory and Aging Study of the Johns Hopkins ADRC – 410-550-9021**
- **Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Studies in Cognitively Normal Individuals or Individuals with Mild Memory Problems – 410-502-4797**
- **Positron Emission Tomography (PET) Studies in Individuals with Mild Memory Problems – gsmith95@jhmi.edu**
- **Medication Trials in Individuals with Mild Memory Problems or Dementia – 410-550-9022**
- **Trial of an Online Platform to Help Caregivers Manage Dementia-Related Behavioral and Psychological Problems – wecareadvisorstudy.com**

For more information about research studies conducted by the Johns Hopkins Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, visit alzresearch.org.



The Johns Hopkins Alzheimer's Disease Research Center

Director

Marilyn Albert, Ph.D.

Associate Directors

Constantine Lyketsos, M.D., MHS

Philip Wong, Ph.D.

Community Outreach:

410-550-2281

Education Resources:

410-614-0363

Research Opportunities:

410-550-2281

Web: alzresearch.org

The Johns Hopkins Memory & Alzheimer's Treatment Center

Director

Constantine Lyketsos, M.D., MHS

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Marilyn Albert, Ph.D.

Clinic Info: 410-550-6337

Web: bit.ly/MemoryCenter

PATIENT AND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

A variety of support services offer patients and caregivers opportunities to speak with others who have similar concerns and questions about coping with Alzheimer's disease or related disorders. These services also provide practical information and help members learn more about living with memory loss.

The programs below are free, open to the public and currently held **virtually**. Call or email for more information and to receive a Zoom link.

Hopkins ElderPlus Caregivers Support Group

Second Thursday of every month, 12:30 – 2 p.m.

Info.: 410-550-8093

Frontotemporal Dementia Group

Facilitated by Paula Notarangelo, RN-BC, MS, Alzheimer's Association

Second Wednesday of every month, 10:30 a.m – 12:30 p.m.

Fourth Wednesday of every month, 7 – 8:30 p.m.

Info.: 410-294-2409 or notorangelopaula@gmail.com

Patient and Family Resources

Info.: bit.ly/MemoryCenter (Scroll down to "Patient and Family Resources.")

For more information about support groups in your area, visit alz.org/Maryland and click on "Help & Support."

Outreach coordinators are available to give presentations on topics related to memory loss and brain health, or host resource tables at community events. For more information, contact Ashley Scott at 410-550-2281 or ascott41@jhmi.edu.