

SIU involved in national studies for Alzheimer Disease

Three clinical trials under way

Alzheimer disease (AD) is the most common form of dementia. According to the Alzheimer Association, more than five million people in the U.S. are living with this devastating disease.

National clinical studies as well as medical services are available to Illinois residents from the Center for Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders (CADRD) at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield.

"It's an exciting time for us here at SIU medical school because more is being learned about the disease and ways to treat it," says **Tom Ala, M.D.**, associate professor of neurology and interim director of CADRD.

Currently three clinical trials at SIU are testing drug therapies that may benefit patients who may have Alzheimer disease. Dr. Ala is principal investigator for all three trials.

■ SIU is one of only three centers in the United States conducting a study of raloxifene, a selective estrogen receptor modulator, to see if it can slow the decline and perhaps improve the cognitive function of post-menopausal women with probable AD. Sponsors and collaborators on this study are Indiana University, Kaiser Permanente, and Stanford University. Dr. Ala is currently recruiting patients. Eligible women must be at least 60 years old, have gone through menopause, and meet diagnostic criteria for probable Alzheimer Disease of mild or moderate severity. The National Institutes of Health, the National Institute on Aging and SIU are funding this study.

■ Patients also are being recruited for a clinical trial that is evaluating a monoclonal antibody called bapineuzumab to see if it may help control the progression of probable AD. Many researchers believe that a

protein in the brain called amyloid causes AD. Dr. Ala's team hypothesizes that bapineuzumab can target and destroy the amyloid, thus slowing the progression of AD. SIU is one of about 200 sites in the United States and Canada testing this drug. Élan Pharmaceuticals is funding the study. Patients with mild to moderate AD are eligible. Candidates will first be pre-screened for eligibility, and if selected will need to visit the SIU Memory and Aging Clinic in Springfield for treatment and tests approximately 20 times over the course of 18 months.

■ A third trial is for the study of valproate, an anticonvulsant drug, to see if it may delay the emergence of agitation and/or psychosis in outpatients with probable AD. Dr. Ala and **Sandy Vicari, Ph.D.**, are the primary investigators. The plan of this study is relatively novel, designed both to determine if the drug will delay or prevent the emergence of psychopathology in AD or if it will slow the clinical progression of AD. Interpretation of



Dr. Ala, interim director of the SIU Center for Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders (CADRD), and his staff use a variety of techniques to define and treat patients' memory problems.

these results will be supported by study of relevant laboratory tests and imaging data. Approximately 300 participants from 25-35 centers in the United States have enrolled in this project, funded by the Alzheimer Disease Cooperative Study. The study is closed to enrollment.

Center for Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders

A team of medical specialists, including neurologists and neuropsychologists, have been battling Alzheimer Disease at SIU's Alzheimer Center in Springfield. In addition to conducting research, the center, which opened in 1987, offers comprehensive services to treat patients, counsel families and sponsor educational events for health-care professionals and the public in 93 Illinois counties. A 31-member primary provider network is part of the Springfield-based center. The network is made up of physicians, nurses, and nursing home staff members throughout Illinois, who are trained to identify Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. Last year, more than 2,000 patients in the network visited the center.