

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN RESEARCHERS DEVELOP SEVERITY INDEX FOR ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

DALLAS – May 24, 2000 - UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas researchers have developed an easy, inexpensive index to measure the severity of Alzheimer's disease.

"The index correlates a simple lab test determining the amount of platelet Alzheimer's plaque protein (APP) in a syringe of blood with the most basic cognitive test in a significantly statistical ratio," said Dr. Fred Baskin, lead author of the study, which appears in the May 24 issue of the *Journal of Neurology*. Baskin is an associate professor of neurology and a researcher in UT Southwestern's Alzheimer's Disease Center (ADC).

The samples of APP were compared with a patient's score on the Mini-Mental State Exam at the beginning of the study and again after three years. The correlation of the cognitive vs. the physiological score clearly indicated a relationship between APP formation in the brain and the patient's mental decline.

Baskin said that the test also works as a marker. "But so far it works more effectively as a marker for the mid-to-severe stages of the disease than for early Alzheimer's disease," he said.

To make the index specific for Alzheimer's disease, the researchers used the blood test on comparative groups of patients, including eight suffering from Parkinson's disease and six stroke patients. Dr. Roger Rosenberg, director of the ADC and a member of the research group, said he and his colleagues previously reported that the APP processing in the platelets of patients with Alzheimer's disease is different from that of control subjects in a 1997 study published in the *Archives of Neurology*.

Eleven Alzheimer's patients in 10 Dallas-area nursing homes, who had been part of the earlier research, participated in the new study. Baskin said blood and cognitive tests were given to the Alzheimer's patients and to eight patients with Parkinson's disease and eight stroke patients, whose symptoms sometimes are similar to those seen with Alzheimer's disease. The

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scores from 11 of the control subjects tested in the 1997 study were reevaluated for use in the current study.

Rosenberg said he and his associates are excited about the possibilities the new research holds. They are planning to participate in upcoming national multi-center Alzheimer's study that will provide a larger group for testing.

Funding for the research was provided by the national Alzheimer's Association in conjunction with the Alzheimer's Association - Greater Dallas Chapter, the National Institute on Aging and the M.B. Rudman Foundation of Dallas.

"We are indeed grateful for their backing without which this important study could not have been pursued," said Rosenberg.

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