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## UT SOUTHWESTERN ESTABLISHES FIRST ALZHEIMER'S PROGRAM FOR NATIVE AMERICANS

DALLAS --Researchers at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center are launching a study of Alzheimer's disease among native Americans in Oklahoma.

Over the next two years, the clinical care program of UT Southwestern's Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC) will open satellite clinics in urban and rural areas with large minority populations in northern Oklahoma and northeast Texas.

"The Oklahoma component is the first clinical research program to look at Alzheimer's disease and its many problems in the native American population," said Dr. Roger Rosenberg, director of UT Southwestern's Alzheimer's Disease Research Center. Rosenberg, who will oversee the clinical research program in Oklahoma, holds the Abe (Brunky), Morris and William Zale Chair in Neurology.

Alzheimer's disease, which causes mental deterioration, affects the brain and eventually attacks the entire muscular system of the body. The illness affects 1 in 10 persons over 65. No one knows whether Alzheimer's disease occurs in the same percentage of older native Americans as the national average because no research has been done on native Americans until now.

Researchers say that studying Alzheimer's in native Americans presents many challenges. For example, there is no word in the Cherokee language for the disease. Words for "senility," "old age" and

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"peculiar behavior" come closest to describing the condition. Many older native Americans do not speak English, and many use only native American medicine, so they have no conventional medical history.

Dr. Jim Hom, who heads the psychology component of the ADRC, and his team are adapting some of the brain function tests for Alzheimer's disease and strokes to accommodate cultural differences.

A majority of the native Americans in the studies will be members of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, whose chief, Wilma Mankiller, has pledged cooperation. "Most of us [tribal members] know someone with Alzheimer's, and it's a heartbreaking disease," said Chief Mankiller. "It's sad to see someone who is vibrant and active in the community just go away."

The Oklahoma clinics will be located at the W.W. Hastings Indian Hospital in Tahlequah, Okla., a U.S. Public Health Service hospital serving the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and at the Alzheimer's Disease Research Unit at St. John Medical Center in Tulsa. The Oklahoma clinical research programs are under the supervision Dr. Ralph Richter, a Tulsa neurologist who has been diagnosing and treating native Americans with Alzheimer's disease and other neurological problems for a number of years. Richter said he and his associates are delighted to join in this research effort with UT Southwestern. "It will be more work, but it will bring scientific credibility to the Oklahoma effort," the Tulsa neurologist said.

The research project is funded by an \$800,000 grant from the National Institute on Aging's (NIA) Alzheimer's Disease Research Program. The NIA is part of the National Institutes of Health.

The Northeast Texas program will serve urban clinics in Oak Cliff, South Dallas and West Dallas. A clinic in Tyler will serve a rural population. The

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Dallas program is at the Elder Care Service of the Dallas County Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center, 1350 North Westmoreland. The Tyler clinic will be housed in the Andrew Center, regional center of the Texas Department of Mental Health and Retardation. Heading the Northeast Texas clinical research program is Dr. Myron Weiner, professor and vice chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at UT Southwestern.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School, affiliated teaching hospitals and outpatient clinics.