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Alzheimer's forum speaker says treatment key is prevention

DALLAS – Aug. 22, 2013 – For years, clinical trials for Alzheimer's disease unsuccessfully focused on people with dementia – a stage in the disease now considered by physicians to be too late to represent an ideal time for treatment.

But as modern medicine hones new techniques – primarily brain imaging and biomarker testing – to identify people who do not yet have clinical symptoms but are at risk for Alzheimer's, the focus in clinical trials is shifting from people with dementia to people with no symptoms but who do have imaging and biofluid signs of pathology.

Preventing Alzheimer's disease through early detection will be one of the key themes of Dr. Clifford R. Jack Jr.'s Sept. 16 lecture at the Fall Public Forum, presented by the Friends of the Alzheimer's Disease Center at UT Southwestern Medical Center. The free lecture is titled "The Future of Diagnosing and Treating Alzheimer's Disease."

Dr. Jack, professor of radiology at Mayo Medical School, said, "Treating those with Alzheimer's disease isn't going to be about restoring people with dementia to normal cognitive function. It's going to be about preventing it in those who are at risk."

The Forum begins at 7 p.m. in the Simmons/Hamon Biomedical Research Buildings, 6000 Harry Hines Blvd. Attendance can be confirmed by calling 214-648-2344.

"Dr. Clifford R. Jack Jr. is a distinguished Alzheimer's expert who will discuss magnetic resonance imaging techniques for diagnosing and measuring the progression of Alzheimer's," said Dr. Roger Rosenberg, director of the Alzheimer's Disease Center at UT Southwestern.

The Friends group has contributed more than \$1 million since 1996 toward research efforts at UT Southwestern into neurodegenerative disease. Support from the Friends helps researchers embark on important investigations into Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases and attracts additional funding from governmental agencies, advocacy organizations, and other supporters

Dr. Jack's research group at the Mayo Clinic serves as the central MRI lab for national and international observational and therapeutic studies in Alzheimer's disease. His group heads the MRI section for the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative, which began in 2005. The Alzheimer's Disease Center at UT Southwestern is one of the research sites for this study.

Dr. Jack said physicians already have developed effective methods of testing for Alzheimer's

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disease, often turning up signs of its pathology a decade or two before the patient develops any clinical signs of dementia. Through advanced brain imaging and spinal taps that test for the presence of beta-amyloid in the cerebrospinal fluid, it's possible to find and identify definitive evidence of the disease.

“People have thought of Alzheimer's disease as a condition defined by observable, clinical symptoms,” Dr. Jack said. “The reality is that brain pathology that ultimately causes the symptoms precedes those symptoms by many years.”

Unlike hypertension, in which clinicians can measure blood pressure with a simple pressure cuff, testing for signs of Alzheimer's disease remains costly and invasive, Dr. Jack said. The Food and Drug Administration also hasn't approved a treatment that slows, stops, or reverses the effects of Alzheimer's in more than a decade – and no drug on the market is effective at relieving the symptoms.

Dr. Jack said he is optimistic, however, that a focus on pre-symptomatic patients who show signs that they will develop the disease will lead to better treatments.

“A better understanding of both the basic biology of the disease and of biomarkers obtained from living people will lead to a design of clinical trials that hopefully will demonstrate a therapeutic effect,” he said. “If one could intervene earlier, you would be able to exert a much stronger effect at delaying the disease.”

Dr. Jack, at Mayo since 1985, has been recognized by numerous neurology and radiology groups. Last year he was elected to the inaugural Council of Distinguished Investigators of the Academy of Radiology Research. Other awards include the 2007 American Society of Neuroradiology Award for Outstanding Contributions in Research; the 2008 Potamkin Prize from the American Academy of Neurology; the 2012 International Society of Magnetic Resonance in Medicine Gold Medal; and the 2012 MetLife Foundation Award for Medical Research in Alzheimer's Disease.

About UT Southwestern Medical Center

UT Southwestern, one of the premier academic medical centers in the nation, integrates pioneering biomedical research with exceptional clinical care and education. The institution's faculty has many distinguished members, including five who have been awarded Nobel Prizes since 1985. Numbering more than 2,700, the faculty is responsible for groundbreaking medical advances and is committed to translating science-driven research quickly to new clinical treatments. UT Southwestern physicians provide medical care in 40 specialties to nearly 90,000 hospitalized patients and oversee more than 1.9 million outpatient visits a year.

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