Small Trial Finds Donepezil Effective in African Americans With Alzheimer’s

BY DOUG BRUNK
San Diego Bureau

WASHINGTON — Higher intake of n-3 fatty acids may improve cognitive function against cognitive impairment, according to a study presented at the annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America.

In a study of almost 1,000 people aged 65 years and older, those with dementia had significantly lower plasma levels of n-3 fatty acids, said Antonio Cherubini, M.D., of the Institute of Gerontology and Geriatrics in Perugia, Italy.

The n-3 fatty acids are an important component of the neuronal membrane, influencing membrane fluidity and all the related functions, such as signal transduction and enzyme function. Fish—particularly fatty fish, such as mackerel and halibut tuna—are the primary source of n-3 fatty acids.

Dr. Cherubini presented data from the Aging in Chianti (InCHIANTI) study conducted between 1998 and 2000 in the Chianti region of Italy.

The 935 volunteers were categorized as having normal cognition (725 subjects), mild cognitive impairment (153 subjects), or dementia (57 subjects). Cognitive function was assessed using the Mini-Mental State Examination. The subjects with age- and education-unadjusted scores lower than 26 on the examination underwent more detailed tests. The diagnosis of dementia was made according to DSM-IV criteria.

Subjects with dementia had the lowest n-3 fatty acid plasma concentrations—as a percentage of total fatty acid plasma concentrations in mg/L—with a mean of 2.7% vs. 3.0% for the cognitively impaired subjects. Subjects with dementia had the highest plasma concentrations of saturated fatty acids—as a percentage of total fatty acid plasma concentrations in mg/L—with a mean of 31.4% vs. 30.1% for the normal cognition group and 30.3% for the normal cognition group.

There was a significant negative correlation between n-3 fatty acid plasma concentrations and the cognitive impairment group and 3.2% for the normal cognition group.

There was not significant after adjustment. The difference between normal subjects and those with mild cognitive impairment was not significant after adjustment.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between n-3 fatty acid concentrations and the development of dementia, but the results have been conflicting, Dr. Cherubini said.

Cognitive Decline Unchecked in Some After One Stroke

BY KERRI WACHTER
Senior Writer

SAN DIEGO — Use of memantine in patients with moderate to severe Alzheimer’s disease significantly reduced their behavioral disturbances and psychiatric symptoms, compared with placebo, Jeffrey L. Cummings, M.D., reported in a poster session at the annual meeting of the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry.

“We think this represents an important, newly recognized benefit for the use of memantine in patients with Alzheimer’s disease,” Dr. Cummings, director of the University of California, Los Angeles, Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center, said in an interview. “The question we posed was, does a drug like memantine, which is used for cognitive improvement, have any effect on agitation? What we saw was that in several analyses—whether we looked at week 12 or week 24, whether we looked at patients who were asymptomatic at baseline or symptomatic at baseline—memantine reduced agitation.

For the 24-week study, Dr. Cummings and his associates randomized 403 patients at 37 clinical centers who had moderate to severe Alzheimer’s disease to receive either memantine 10 mg b.i.d. or placebo. The memantine was titrated up weekly in 5-mg increments from a starting dose of 5 mg/day during week 1 to 20 mg/day at week 4. All patients remained on donepezil throughout the study.

The investigators used the Neuropsychiatric Inventory (NPI) to assess behavioral symptoms at baseline, week 12, and week 24.

Of the 403 community-dwelling patients, 202 received memantine and 201 received placebo. The mean age of study participants was 76 years, and 65% were female. Most (91%) were white.

When compared with patients in the placebo group at 12 weeks, those in the memantine group had significant improvements on the NPI domains of agitation/aggression (−0.4 vs. 0.2), irritability/lability (−0.4 vs. 0.1), and appetite/eating (−0.4 vs. 0.1), where a negative value denotes improvement and a positive value signifies worsening of symptoms. Improvements in all of these NPI domains remained statistically significant at 24 weeks.

“I was surprised by the magnitude and consistency of the effect,” Dr. Cummings told CLINICAL NEUROLOGY NEWS.

The investigators also observed that in patients who were asymptomatic at baseline, memantine treatment resulted in significantly less emergence of agitation/aggression and appetite/eating changes by week 24, compared with those on placebo.

According to Dr. Cummings, this is the first study to look at memantine in patients with moderate to severe Alzheimer’s disease.