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

*BY DOUG BRUNK*

**San Diego Bureau**

**SAN DIEGO —** Donepezil is safe and effective in African Americans with mild to moderate Alzheimer’s disease, a 12-week open-label study demonstrated.

The finding is important because African Americans are underrepresented in clinical trials even though they have a higher risk for Alzheimer’s disease, compared with whites, Patrick Griffith, M.D., said during a poster session at the annual meeting of the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry.

This study used the Fuld Object Memo- 
yr Evaluation (FOME), a culturally un-biased evaluation of memory. "The test has been validated in African Americans, and it operates independent of educa-
tional level or [social background],” Dr. Griffith, chief of the division of neuro-
logy at Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, said in an interview. "It relies on touch and vision. We may have a more mea-
suring tool for future clinical trials that will avoid previous reports of education-
or cultural bias."

He added that the FOME was designed

**Low Plasma N-3 Fatty Acids Linked to Dementia**

*BY KERRI WACHTER*

**Senior Writer**

**WASHINGTON —** Higher intake of n-3 fatty acids provide a neuroprotective effect against cognitive impairment, according to data 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 trans-
duction and enzyme function. Fish—par-
ticularly fatty fish, such as mackerel and albacore 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), possible cognitive impairment (153 subjects), or de-
mentia (57 subjects). Cognitively normal subjects were screened using the Mini-Mental State Examination. The subjects age, gender, 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 31.4% vs. 30.1%

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

Recent studies have examined the rel-
ationship between n-3 fatty acid con-
sumption and the development of de-
mentia, but the results have been conflicting, Dr. Cherubini said.

**Cognitive Decline Unchecked in Some After One Stroke**

*BY DOUG BRUNK*

**San Diego Bureau**

**BAL HARBOUR, FLA. —** Cognition declines in the year after a single stroke for a substantial minority of patients, ac-
cording to a study presented at the annual meeting of the American Neuropsy-
chiatric Association.

After the initial poststroke period, most experts would expect cognition to im-
prove or remain stable, according to the literature. However, some studies with a longer follow-up now suggest cognitive decline is possible after a single stroke, even in younger patients. The current re-
search supports that finding and shows the utility of screening patients with the Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE).

The cognitive impairment due to stroke is not static. "Our findings suggest

there is a subpopulation that continues to decline at this age,” Gregory Kellerm-
eyer, M.D., said in an interview.

The investigators assessed 16 men and 10 women at least 1 year following a sin-
gle known stroke. The mean follow-up was almost 6 years. Participants were rel-
atively young with a mean age of 58 years.

Pretreatment data for the stroke survivors came from a study of con-
trols from the Chianti Study, and the Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE) on the impaired side.

Cognitive deficits can occur indepen-
dent of motor decline. The implication is that “even a single stroke may in some

**Memantine May Ease Agitation In Alzheimer’s**

*BY DOUG BRUNK*

**San Diego Bureau**

**SAN DIEGO —** Use of memantine in patients with moderate to severe Alzheimer’s disease significantly reduced their behavioral disturbances and psychi-
tric 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 asympto-
matic at baseline or symptomatic at base-
line—memantine reduced agitation.

For the 24-week study, Dr. Cummings and his associates randomized 403 pa-
tients at 37 clinical centers who had mod-
erate to severe Alzheimer’s disease to re-
ceive either memantine 10 mg b.i.d. or placebo. The memantine was titrated up weekly in 5-mg increments from a start-
ging 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 Neuropsy-
chiatric Inventory (NPI) to assess behav-
ioral symptoms at baseline, week 12, and week 24.

Of the 403 community-dwelling pa-
tients, 202 received memantine and 201 re-
ceived placebo. The mean age of study participants was 76 years, and 63% were fe-
male. Most (91%) were white.

When compared with patients in the placebo group at 12 weeks, those in the me-
manite group had significant improve-
ments on the NPI domains of agitation/aggression (–0.4 vs. 0.2), irritability/lability (–0.4 vs. 0.1), and ap-
etite/eating change (–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 signifi-
cant at 24 weeks.

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

The investigators also observed that in patients who were asymptomatic at base-
line, memantine treatment resulted in significantly less emergence of agita-
tion/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 meman-
tine on behavior in Alzheimer’s disease.

Forest Laboratories Inc., manufacturer of memantine, supported the study.