Research presented at AAIC® 2018 focused on prevention, risk reduction, treating non-cognitive symptoms of dementia and more

New research results presented at the Alzheimer’s Association International Conference® (AAIC®) 2018 in Chicago highlight the need to manage risk factors for Alzheimer’s and other dementias and also to treat the non-cognitive symptoms of dementia, among other findings. AAIC is the premier annual forum for presentation and discussion of the latest Alzheimer’s research. Nearly 100 leading philanthropists attended as part of the 2018 Global Immersion Experience.

New Alzheimer’s/dementia clinical trial results offer hope — SPRINT MIND trial

Preliminary results of the SPRINT MIND trial provide the strongest evidence to date about reducing risk of mild cognitive impairment (MCI) and dementia through the treatment of high blood pressure. SPRINT (Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial) is a randomized clinical trial that compares two strategies for managing hypertension in older adults: an intensive strategy versus a standard care strategy. SPRINT MIND (Memory and Cognition IN Decreased Hypertension) examined whether the intensive strategy reduces the risk of developing dementia and/or MCI. The researchers found a statistically significant 19 percent lower rate of new cases of MCI in the intensive blood pressure treatment group. The combined outcome of MCI plus probable all-cause dementia was 15 percent lower in the intensive versus standard treatment group.

The new U.S. Study to Protect Brain Health Through Lifestyle Intervention to Reduce Risk (U.S. POINTER), a two-year clinical trial led and funded by the Alzheimer’s Association, will evaluate whether a multicomponent lifestyle intervention, including management of cardiovascular disease risk, can protect cognitive function in older adults at increased risk for cognitive decline.

Link between pregnancy, reproductive history and dementia risk in women

Several studies highlighted sex differences associated with dementia, including the first ever large-scale study of reproductive history and dementia risk in women. Researchers found that women with three or more children had a 12 percent lower risk of dementia compared to women with one child. Each additional report of a miscarriage was associated with a 9 percent increased risk of dementia compared to women who reported no miscarriages. In another study, researchers reported that women who spent 12.5 percent more months pregnant than otherwise identical women had about 20 percent lower Alzheimer’s risk.
First dementia prevalence data in LGB older adults

Researchers reported the first dementia prevalence data from a large population of lesbian, gay and bisexual older adults. They examined the prevalence of dementia among nearly 4,000 LGB adults age 60+ and found the prevalence of dementia was 8 percent in this study population (U.S. prevalence of dementia for adults age 65+ is approximately 10 percent). Given concerns of social isolation and sometimes limited access to friend and family caregivers, there is a strong need to create a supportive health care environment and caregiving resources for LGBT individuals living with dementia.

Preliminary successes treating non-cognitive symptoms of dementia

Several studies reported on treating the behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia. A randomized, double-blind clinical trial of nabilone — a synthetic cannabinoid — suggests it may be effective in treating agitation in people with moderate to severe Alzheimer’s. Agitation is one of the most common behavioral changes associated with Alzheimer’s and can be a significant cause of caregiver stress.

Gut bacteria and lipid metabolism may influence Alzheimer’s and other brain diseases

Four new studies reported on how the digestive system, including gut and liver functions, may be related to changes in the brain and to brain disorders such as Alzheimer’s. Emerging science has correlated certain changes in gut bacteria with a variety of inflammatory and autoimmune conditions, and studies have shown that changes in diet can change the gut bacteria. Gut microbiome research may give us new insight into why diet and nutrition are so important for brain health.

BAN2401 phase II data released

Eisai Co., Ltd. and Biogen Inc. announced additional results of a phase II clinical trial of the experimental Alzheimer’s drug BAN2401. Though the trial did not meet its primary endpoint, as reported in December 2017, the researchers reported results on several of the trial’s secondary outcomes, including reduction of amyloid plaques and improvement of cognition and function. This is the second Alzheimer’s clinical trial that has demonstrated both clearance of amyloid from the brain and cognitive benefits. While neither study was large enough to definitively demonstrate cognitive efficacy, they indicate that amyloid remains an important therapeutic target to pursue in Alzheimer’s.

New guidelines for clinical diagnosis of Alzheimer’s and other dementias

A workgroup convened by the Alzheimer’s Association has developed 20 diagnostic recommendations for physicians and nurse practitioners, and it is honing them with input from leaders in the field with the goal of publishing them later this year. The recommendations range from enhancing efforts to recognize symptoms to communicating compassionately with individuals and their caregivers. Currently there are no consensus diagnostic recommendations for primary care physicians. Symptoms of Alzheimer’s and other dementias too often go unrecognized or are misattributed, causing delays in appropriate diagnoses and care that are both harmful and costly.