

# February, 2004

## Successful Aging

Paul R. Solomon, PhD

### **Namenda Now Available to Treat Alzheimer's Disease**

Namenda (Na-MEN-da) was approved by the FDA on October 17, 2001. It is now just beginning to be available in local pharmacies. The Memory Clinic in Bennington has been receiving many inquiries regarding Namenda. Here are some of the most commonly asked questions.

#### **What is Namenda?**

Namenda is the first medication approved in the United States to treat moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease (AD). It works differently than the currently approved medications (Aricept, Exelon, Reminyl).

#### **Is Namenda the same Medication as Memantine?**

Yes, in the United States Namenda is the brand name for memantine HCL. Memantine has been available in Europe for the past year under the brand name Exiba.

#### **Does Namenda Cure or Stop Alzheimer's Disease?**

Namenda is not a cure for Alzheimer's disease nor does it stop the progression of the disease, but it can help people with the disease. To date, no medication has been shown to slow or halt the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

#### **How Does Namenda Work?**

Alzheimer's disease is a brain disease. For reasons that are not fully understood, cells (neurons) in the brain die in patients with AD. As brain cells die, they lose the ability to give off chemicals called neurotransmitters. These neurotransmitters help brain cells communicate. It is the communication between brain cells that allows the formation of memories. Namenda facilitates this communication between cells by affecting the neural transmitter glutamate.

#### **Who Should Take Namenda?**

Namenda is approved for the treatment of moderate to severe Alzheimer's Disease. Patients and caregivers interested in learning whether Namenda is right for them should talk with their healthcare professional.

### **What are the Stages of Alzheimer's Disease?**

Healthcare professionals will administer a series of tests to determine the stage of Alzheimer's disease and to determine appropriate treatments. The results of these tests allow the patient to be generally placed in one of three categories:

**Mild:** Patients are alert and sociable, but forgetfulness begins to interfere with daily living

**Moderate:** Often the longest stage. Deterioration of memory, reasoning, behavior and functioning gradually occurs.

**Severe:** Continuing deterioration of abilities with increased confusion, disorientation, and loss of language skills, Patients may require assistance with day-to-day functions such as washing, grooming, and using the bathroom. They may require 24-hour care.

### **Is Namenda Safe?**

In clinical trials, Namenda has been found to be safe and well tolerated. The most commonly reported side effects are dizziness, headache, constipation, and confusion.

### **What is the Memory Clinic's Experience with Namenda?**

The Memory Clinic has been using Namenda for about 5 years. We participated in the first clinical trial in the United States the results of which were recently published in the New England Journal of Medicine. The study indicated that the drug was both safe and effective. Over the past year we have been obtaining the drug via Europe for our patients. We have also used this drug in some of our patients who are already taking Aricept. A recent study has shown that when added to Aricept, Namenda provides additional benefit.

### **Can the Drug be Taken in Patients with Mild Alzheimer's Disease?**

Presently, the drug is only approved for moderate to severe disease, but a recent study (not yet published) has shown the drug to also be effective in mild to moderate disease.

### **How is Namenda Different from other Alzheimer's Disease Medications?**

Namenda is the only drug approved for severe stages of AD. The other medications (Aricept, Exelon, Reminyl) are approved for mild to moderate disease. Namenda works by targeting a specific brain chemical called glutamate. The other medications target acetylcholine. Both glutamate and acetylcholine are important in learning and memory.

Dr. Solomon is a professor of psychology at Williams College and clinical director of The Memory Clinic in Bennington, Vt.

**If you would like further information regarding information in this column, please contact to Dr. Solomon, The Memory Clinic, 100 Hospital Drive, 3rd Floor East, Bennington VT 05201, Phone: 802 447-1409, FAX, 802-442-5199, email: [psolomon@williams.edu](mailto:psolomon@williams.edu)**

