

UNDERSTANDING THE LINK BETWEEN SLEEP AND DEMENTIA

“It is a common experience that a problem difficult at night is resolved in the morning, after the committee of sleep has worked on it”.

_ F. Scott Fitzgerald

As researchers, we are struggling with how to treat Alzheimer’s Disease (AD), as it is one of the greatest health challenges of the 21st century. This is a worldwide epidemic, with one in ten adults diagnosed over the age of 65. Despite the numbers and the devastating impact of the illness, there have been no new medications approved for the treatment of AD for over 10 years (!).

At Dean Foundation, we are embarking on a new study of an investigational compound that works by a very different mechanism than the medications on the market today. Researchers have noted that sleep disruption is a key element in AD.

It is known that as we age, there is a decrease in sleep, particularly slow wave sleep. This decline begins in midlife and continues to decline over time. Sleep becomes more fragmented and less restful. In people who suffer from Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), these sleep problems are even more pronounced. Over 60% of patients with MCI and AD have some type of sleep disorder, most commonly insomnia and sleep apnea.

This investigational medication, piromelatine, may improve sleeping patterns in people with mild Alzheimer’s disease. Researchers believe there may be an important link between sleep, cognitive impairment and Alzheimer’s disease.

Considering the importance of sleep, clinicians should be enquiring about sleep patterns as part of a routine exam, particularly in the elderly. More clinical trials are needed to determine whether sleep improvement can reduce AD risk, delay onset or alleviate cognitive decline.

This study is a double-blind, placebo-controlled study of this drug in patients already diagnosed with Mild Dementia or MCI. Every subject must have a caregiver who stays overnight with the patient at least three nights per week. Patients who are receiving prescribed drugs for treatment of AD (Donepezil, Galantamine, etc) will be allowed in the study and may continue on these medications.

Promoting sleep as an intervention for MCI is a novel, exciting development. There is so little we can control when it comes to AD, sleep is one symptom that can potentially improve. Increased sleep time and quality may have a positive effect on cognitive function.

At Dean Foundation, we are offering free memory screen Monday through Thursday from 9am-4:30pm for anyone interested in a brief memory test. The best way to try to understand the disease and develop strategies for treatment and prevention is through clinical trials. If you are concerned about your memory or have a loved one who is concerned, please stop by for a memory test. If you are interested in the study or have more questions, please contact JoAnn at 608-827-2333 or visit us on dean.org. Like us on Facebook!