Innovative Treatment Approaches in Alzheimer’s Disease: Current and Future, Part 1

George T. Grossberg, MD

This issue of Primary Psychiatry as well as next month’s issue focus on the many exciting current and emerging therapies for Alzheimer’s disease. This issue presents three important topics of interest to primary care physicians and psychiatrists.

Nazem Bassil, MD, and George T. Grossberg, MD, address the emerging area of prevention of Alzheimer’s disease. In Part 1 of this article, the authors stress that some risk factors for Alzheimer’s disease such as age and family history are not modifiable. However, many potentially modifiable risk factors exist. Most vital seems to be controlling cardiovascular risk factors. These include hypertension, diabetes, hyperlipidemia, obesity, smoking, and lack of exercise. Indeed, there is growing evidence that “what is good for the heart is good for the brain.” Data on the Mediterranean diet, antioxidants, fish-oil, and B vitamins are also reviewed. Part 2 will appear next month.

Jothika N. Manepalli, MD, and colleagues discuss current evidence for the utility of many psychosocial and environmental therapies for Alzheimer’s disease patients and their caregivers. They review data on the value of a variety of treatments including reality orientation, reminiscence therapy, light therapy, aromatherapy, and animal-assisted therapy, among others. Again, exercise is a focus, with growing evidence that physical exercise may slow the course of Alzheimer’s disease.

William J. Burke, MD, and colleagues provide a clear and concise overview of the “amyloid hypothesis” in Alzheimer’s disease and what the future holds relative to amyloid-based therapies. They discuss past failures and future promising avenues for amyloid-based interventions including immunization against β-amyloid, both active and passive. The promise of secretase inhibitors and anti-fibrillization agents as well as the possible roles of excess zinc and copper in plaque formation are detailed.

Next month’s issue will feature articles on possible protective factors for Alzheimer’s disease and will discuss the important topic of tau-based therapies for Alzheimer’s disease. PP