

Drug companies share data to speed brain research

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(AP) -- In an unusual step, a dozen competing drug companies have agreed to share data on thousands of Alzheimer's patients in hopes that the extra information will spark new ideas for treatments.

The database being announced Friday covers 4,000 patients and counting. It was created in consultation with government regulators and the National Institutes of Health.

The effort may sound wonky, but attempt after attempt to create new Alzheimer's medications - ones that might help before too much of a person's memory is destroyed - have failed.

In pooling resources from clinical trials, scientists can hunt trends that may suggest what to study next. The database also will be available to brain researchers not affiliated with [drug companies](#), to compare their own findings, and eventually will address other [neurodegenerative diseases](#) such as Parkinson's.

"This is the kind of thing that's not going to produce a new treatment next week," cautioned [Food and Drug Administration](#) Deputy Commissioner Joshua Sharfstein. But, "it's the kind of collaboration that does represent a major shift in thinking about how to accelerate drug development."

It's detailed information - memory tests, brain scans, blood samples - that the FDA already receives from companies. But Sharfstein said

having the data recorded the same way in one spot also may help regulators more easily analyze questions about safety or standards for new studies.

Called the Coalition Against Major Diseases, the collaboration pairs patient-advocacy groups with such pharmaceutical giants as [GlaxoSmithKline](#), Pfizer Inc. and [AstraZeneca](#). It is led by the Critical Path Institute, a nonprofit partnership with the FDA that aims to speed discovery of new drugs.

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