

Alzheimer's prevention better than a cure

July 14 2011, by Deborah Braconnier

In a new study published in *Nature*, Dr. Sam Gandy from Mount Sinai Medical Center argues that finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease may be near impossible and that the best hope for researchers is to focus on prevention, including treatments some 20 years before symptoms even begin.

It has been more than a century since Alzheimer's was first discovered by psychiatrist Alois Alzheimer when he observed a 51-year-old woman with the [disease](#). After her death, the autopsy revealed a [brain](#) covered with speckled plaques of protein which are now known as amyloid-beta proteins.

While recent studies have shown that these plaques play a role in the disease, there has been one problem. Pharmaceutical companies have developed drugs to clear the plaques from the brain, but even when the plaques are removed, the symptoms of the disease continue and even worsen.

Gandy believes that once these plaques have appeared, the damage they have caused to the brain is too devastating to be reversed and the only hope is to focus on the initial prevention of the disease. Studies utilizing brain scans, blood samples and spinal fluid are looking for possible signs that appear before dementia sets in. These studies are revealing that changes are occurring as early as 20 years before any symptoms are revealed.

Researchers are looking at the possibility of administering amyloid-

lowering drugs well before the [symptoms](#) are able to manifest into the disease and they believe that early treatment is vital.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, by 2050 it is estimated that 16 million Americans will be diagnosed with Alzheimer's. While survival after diagnosis is usually four to eight years, some patients can live more than 20 years.

Gandy believes it could be at least another decade or more of research before they have the key to this disease figured out but that prophylactic intervention is currently the best hope.

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