ADCS Effects of DHA in Slowing the Progression of Alzheimer’s Disease

Type of Project: Multi-center Clinical Drug Trial
Methods: Neurological and Neuropsychological Testing
Status: Funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), $10.5 million to Alzheimer’s Disease Cooperative Study (ADCS)
Study Period: January 2007- January 2010
In Collaboration With: University of California San Diego
Investigators: Edward Zamrini, M.D. (Site Principal Investigator), Norman L. Foster, M.D., James A. Levy, Ph.D., Rebecca Mesley, B.S.

Project Summary:
The purpose of this study is to determine whether DHA supplementation slows the progression of cognitive and functional decline in patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer’s disease. This is a multi-center, double-blind, placebo-controlled study of 400 subjects with mild to moderate Alzheimer’s disease. The patients will be treated for 18 months, during which patients will be given either two grams per day of DHA orally, or placebo. DHA omega-3 is a long-chain polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acid found throughout the body. It is a major structural fat in the brain and accounts for up to 97 percent of the omega-3 fats in the brain. Numerous studies confirm that all age groups, from infants to adults, benefit from an adequate supply of DHA omega-3. Additionally, low levels of DHA have been associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer’s disease.

This study is managed by the Alzheimer’s Disease Cooperative Study (ADCS). ADCS was formed in 1991 as a cooperative agreement between the National Institute of Aging and the University of California San Diego. The ADCS was developed in response to a perceived need to advance research in the development of drugs that might be useful for treating patients with Alzheimer’s disease (AD), particularly drugs that might not be developed by industry. To date, the ADCS has initiated 21 protocols (18 drug trials and 3 instrument protocols). These protocols have enrolled between 8 and 790 subjects and have ranged from Phase I to Phase III studies.

Potential Benefits:
This study could identify a new treatment for Alzheimer’s disease. It would have the advantage over current treatments by slowing the progression of memory loss and other symptoms. This drug is a member of a new class of drugs that may rapidly improve the symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease, but does so through a different method than currently FDA approved drugs.