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News Release

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Studies find that amyloid PET imaging improves care of Veterans with memory problems

BOSTON – Clinicians at the VA Boston Healthcare System found that using amyloid positron emission tomography scans – known as PET scans – among older Veterans with memory loss can accurately diagnose or rule out Alzheimer’s disease, according to two recent studies published today.

“Our work indicates amyloid PET studies are useful in the diagnosis of memory disorders and that these studies have an important role in the clinical care and management of patients with Alzheimer’s disease,” said Dr. Katherine Turk, a neurologist and researcher at VA Boston HCS and the Boston University Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center, and senior author of one of the studies.

While available to Veterans and clinicians in the VA healthcare system, availability of amyloid PET imaging is limited outside the VA healthcare system, as it is not currently covered by insurance or Medicare as a part of routine clinical care. The researchers determined that the scans were appropriately ordered by VA Boston clinicians and that they had an important impact on clinical care and management of patients, according to one of the studies. Both studies were published Aug. 17 in *Alzheimer’s & Dementia: Translational Research & Clinical Interventions* by VA Center for Translational Cognitive Neuroscience researchers at the VA Boston HCS.

The pair of studies included 565 Veterans with memory complaints seen in the Memory Disorders Clinic at VA Boston HCS. Veterans completed a standard work up as part of clinical care, including evaluation with a subspecialty clinician. Researchers determined that amyloid PET scans were ordered for a little over a third of Veterans in the clinic, and were most likely to be ordered for younger Veterans suspected of having Alzheimer’s disease. Nearly all orders adhered to appropriate use criteria and positive scans were associated with less diagnostic variability, fewer additional tests, greater rates of Alzheimer’s disease medication prescriptions, and more referrals to research.

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“We found that these scans were often ordered to ‘rule out’ Alzheimer’s disease, allowing clinicians to focus on other possible diagnoses. Amyloid scans may be used in a similar way throughout the country if they become covered by insurance, which I hope will happen soon,” added Dr. Andrew Budson, chief of Cognitive Behavioral Neurology at VA Boston HCS, professor of neurology at the Boston University School of Medicine, associate director of the Boston University Alzheimer's Disease Center and senior author of one of the studies.

The studies are available on the Alzheimer’s Association website at:

- <https://alz-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/trc2.12320>
- <https://alz-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/trc2.12333>



Dr. Katherine Turk, a neurologist and researcher at VA Boston Healthcare System and the Boston University Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center, demonstrates a computed tomography, or CT, scanner used for positron emission tomography, known as PET, with Dr. Garrett Friedman, a behavioral neurology fellow, at the VA Boston Jamaica Plain campus July 21, 2022. (VA Boston HCS photo by Winfield Danielson)