

News of Health

Progress Against Multiple Sclerosis

(NAPS)—There is good news for the 400,000 Americans who have multiple sclerosis (MS) and the 200 more who are diagnosed with the disease each week. Researchers have discovered that a medication widely used to slow the progression in MS can also slow the decline of cognitive deterioration associated with the disease.

Cognitive deterioration is a common, yet under-recognized, problem of MS. Many people think of MS as a disease that causes only physical disability. In fact, cognitive decline, not physical disability, is the most common reason people with MS leave the workforce.

A new study published in the *Annals of Neurology*, shows that treatment with Avonex® (interferon beta-1a) can help slow cognitive decline, including verbal visual memory loss (forgetfulness) and problems with information processing (performing multiple tasks). According to Dennis Bourdette, M.D., Director of the Multiple Sclerosis Center of Oregon at Oregon Health Sciences University and study researcher, “MS-related cognitive dysfunction can have a devastating impact on people’s lives. It is a major contributing factor to unemployment, accidents, impairment of daily living activities, marital problems and loss of social contacts. In this



Doctors have discovered medication used to treat the physical symptoms of MS may benefit patients' mental abilities as well.

study we demonstrated that treatment with Avonex slows the progression of cognitive disability by about 50 percent.”

MS is a chronic, often disabling disease of the central nervous system. The disease damages the spinal cord in such a way that patients eventually have difficulty walking. In addition, about half of the people with MS find that it also affects their cognitive ability to focus, sustain and shift attention and learn new information and remember it later. This important research is encouraging news for the hundreds of thousands of people living with MS.

More information about MS can be found on the World Wide Web at www.understandingms.com.