

# HEALTH UPDATE

## Promising Drug In Treatment Of Stroke-Induced Dementia

(NAPSA)—Researchers may soon be able to offer more hope to people with dementia. Consider the case of Wayne Banks. Some days he cannot remember from one minute to the next what he was doing. The 71-year-old struggles with vascular dementia, a decline in intellectual abilities, as a result of a stroke, or brain attack.

Vascular dementia (VaD) occurs when brain tissue is damaged, most often by a stroke or series of strokes. The brain cells, in effect, have difficulty working together to help individuals process information. Approximately 39 percent of Americans over age 65 experiencing dementia have VaD, making it second only to Alzheimer's dementia.

"People with VaD lose their ability to process things mentally, that is they lose their ability to remember things, may have some change in their personality, and may have what looks like depression," said Dr. Don Smith, stroke program director at Colorado Neurological Institute. "They also may have difficulties with calculations, solving problems or planning."

It is estimated that nearly a fifth of the people who suffer a stroke will develop problems involving their mental abilities. Symptoms of VaD may include memory loss, language problems, confusion and impaired motor control.

Currently, there is no approved treatment for vascular dementia. However, two recent studies have shown the first promising steps toward treating this condition in Wayne and others like him.

Research recently presented to the American Academy of Neurology reinforced the results of an earlier study that found the drug Aricept® (donepezil hydrochloride tablets) was effective and well-tolerated in patients experiencing vascular dementia. Study participants who took the drug, currently prescribed for mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease, showed improved cognitive—thinking and reasoning—abilities.

According to doctors, the drug may improve a patient's cognitive abilities by helping the undamaged brain cells work together bet-



**Many people who struggle with stroke-induced dementia may find new hope in a new medication.**

ter. Aricept® prevents the breakdown of a chemical in the brain, acetylcholine, which is involved with memory and learning.

The 24-week, randomized study included 603 people with VaD. The majority of participants had a history of stroke, and more than 80 percent were taking medication to prevent stroke.

Patients who were not given Aricept® showed no change in their cognitive abilities. Some of the patients given Aricept® experienced side effects, including diarrhea, nausea and headache.

Every year, more than 750,000 Americans experience a stroke. It is the nation's third leading cause of death and leading cause of adult disability. Vascular dementia is associated with the same risk factors as stroke—high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and high cholesterol.

The prevalence of VaD increases with age, and the number of Americans age 65 and older is expected to increase to nearly 70 million by 2030. Health experts expect the condition to be a growing issue among the country's aging population.

Wayne Banks and his wife remain optimistic. "We've been told the dementia might not get better, but there's hope," Mrs. Banks says.

The manufacturers of Aricept® plan to seek approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to use the drug as a treatment for vascular dementia.

For more information, contact the National Stroke Association at 1-800-STROKES or [www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org).