

Spring 2024 Newsletter

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The Mary S. Easton Center for Alzheimer's Research and Care at UCLA has very active teams working on basic research, drug discovery, biomarkers for early diagnosis and clinical activity including clinical trials, cognitive testing, and patient care.

Ask A Doctor



By: [Alejandra Sánchez López, MD](#), Assistant Clinical Professor of Neurology and Geriatric Medicine Division at UCLA

Lecanemab is a new medication for the treatment of early Alzheimer's disease. In this newsletter's "Ask the Doctor" section, Dr. Sánchez López answers common questions we receive from patients about lecanemab.

1. What is {**LECANEMAB**}, and how does it **work**?

Lecanemab, also known by the brand name Leqembi®, is an anti-amyloid monoclonal antibody approved by the FDA in January 2023 for treating the early stages of Alzheimer's disease.

Two proteins, amyloid beta, and tau, accumulate in the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease. These proteins are toxic to the brain and cause neuronal loss. Lecanemab binds selectively to aggregated forms of amyloid beta to help the immune system remove it from the body.

Watch the Video: <https://youtu.be/BFE8nOyKwhQ?si=oxqibG1LpHZ527x->

2. Who is {**LECANEMAB**} for, and how **effective** is it?

Treatment with lecanemab is indicated in people with early stages of Alzheimer's disease, either with mild dementia or the stage before called mild cognitive impairment, who have a biomarker-confirmed diagnosis.

What we know from the Clarity AD study, in which UCLA was one of many sites, is that people with early-stage Alzheimer's disease who received lecanemab for 18 months had substantially less amyloid burden in their brain and resulted in moderately less decline on measures of cognition and function compared to those who received placebo. Specifically, there was a slower rate of progression of 27%, as measured by the Clinical Dementia Rating scale, which quantifies symptom severity across a range of cognitive and

functional domains. This translates to approximately five months of reduction in decline compared to the placebo group. It is important to clarify that patients were not cured of Alzheimer’s disease, nor the progression halted, but their clinical decline was slower than the group that did not take this medication at the end of 18 months. Because the study only lasted 18 months, we do not have information beyond this timeframe.

Watch the Video: <https://youtu.be/2KWngjL0M78?si=UMY5u8QiqZD5KGZV>

3. What are some possible **side effects** of this drug?

The most common adverse events are infusion-related reactions, which occur in one out of four patients and tend to be mild to moderate in severity. These include transient symptoms like fever, chills, flushing, or blood pressure changes. However, if patients develop these symptoms, they can be premedicated in future doses to help prevent them.

Other possible adverse events are Amyloid-Related Imaging Abnormalities, in short, ARIA. There are two types: ARIA-E, E for edema, meaning swelling of the brain, and ARIA-H, H for hemorrhage or bleeding (cerebral microhemorrhages, macro hemorrhages, or superficial siderosis).

The incidence of **ARIA-E** is about **13%**, mostly asymptomatic (78%) and mild to moderate in severity (91%). **Overall, ~3%** of patients had symptomatic ARIA-E, meaning they had symptoms such as **headache, visual disturbance, or acute confusion**. ARIA-E, in general, tended to occur during the first three months (71%) and resolved within four months (81%).

The incidence of **ARIA-H** is **17%** but largely asymptomatic; **only 0.7% develop symptoms**, most commonly dizziness.

It is important to mention that patients who carry two copies of a gene called APOE4 are at higher risk of ARIA (ARIA-E 33% and ARIA-H 40%). For this reason, we screen all patients for this gene. We also do not recommend treatment for these patients or in people who take blood thinners such as warfarin, apixaban, or rivaroxaban because they increase the risk of bleeding.

	General	APOE4 Heterozygote	APOE4 Homozygote	APOE4 Noncarrier
ARIA-E	13%	11%	33%	5%
ARIA-H	17%	14%	40% (39)	12%

Watch the Video: <https://youtu.be/7hnWEMr1I2k?si=7vR5ws9sawQZyYXI>

4. How is **treatment** with {**LECANEMAB**} administered and monitored at **UCLA**?

Lecanemab is administered as an intravenous infusion over approximately one hour at our infusion center. During this time, patients are monitored for any infusion-related reactions. The infusion is given every two weeks for 18 months.

Throughout the course of treatment, patients are monitored with routine brain MRIs to assess for ARIA, about three MRIs in the first six months and another at the year mark (before the 5th, 7th, and 14th dose and at one year). If there is a presence of ARIA in their brain MRI, a decision would be made regarding continuing or stopping treatment, depending on the severity of ARIA.

If a patient develops symptoms, there is always a provider available to assess the situation and provide guidance, such as whether an urgent MRI or evaluation is needed.

Watch the Video: <https://youtu.be/uZ41G0-vARM?si=RXaASlu7rSki0aEr>

5. What is the **process** to determine the **eligibility** for {**LECANEMAB**} treatment?

At UCLA, we adopted a UC-wide protocol where anti-amyloid therapies are managed by a specialized clinical service called the Alzheimer's Infusion Core (AIC). For each case, this team makes sure that a patient being considered for lecanemab meets eligibility criteria (confirmed Alzheimer's disease in early stages with positive biomarker such as amyloid PET or through spinal fluid testing), we review disqualifying factors such as prior relevant brain bleeds in their baseline MRI, taking blood thinners, and having two copies of APOE4 and few other less common factors.

Watch the Video: <https://youtu.be/fcA1zKduXh0?si=KG8HGcMDbSLKiYQu>

6. Is {**LECANEMAB**} covered by **insurance** or **Medicare**?

As of July 2023, Medicare is covering lecanemab when a clinical team administering this drug participates in a patient registry. The cost of the medication is \$26,500 a year. The cost to beneficiaries will depend on whether or not they have secondary insurance, as original Medicare typically covers 80%. Initial approval is for one year, and therapy may be continued if there is evidence of clinical benefit and the absence of adverse events. Other health insurance has different policies, but it seems that most major commercial insurances provide initial authorization for six months and require reauthorization for the continuation of therapy, but certainly, patients should speak to their insurance provider for guidance.

Watch the Video: <https://youtu.be/FLy1oleK6g0?si=blnPsspOTCS-ir8R>

7. What **other new treatments** are on the horizon for **Alzheimer's disease**?

Recently, the FDA delayed their decision on whether they will approve donanemab, another monoclonal antibody administered once a month with different properties than lecanemab, as it targets a different form of amyloid but overall similar benefit.

There are other drugs under investigation in clinical trials, for example, drugs that target Tau protein, but results are probably a few years away.

Watch the Video: <https://youtu.be/MKp5vCha-r4?si=ulTy0ctpdFbJyXX1>

8. What should I do if I think {**LECANEMAB**} is **an option** for me or my loved one?

If you or your loved one are experiencing cognitive decline, the first step is to discuss this with your primary care doctor, as you might need a referral to a doctor or center with expertise in the evaluation of cognitive impairment and dementia that can provide an accurate diagnosis and offer treatment.

Watch the Video: https://youtu.be/-uN3PwsD_vE?si=mqJtNDZyH8fFb2fj

To learn more about Alzheimer's disease treatment and care at UCLA, please speak with your primary care doctor or call the **UCLA Amyloid Infusion Core** at **(310) 963-2592**.

Additional Video: "Breakthrough in Alzheimer's Disease Treatment"

<https://youtu.be/oSvKGaZ1hqs?si=cPd3RJFF0-0nJe>

ELHA Lab Profile: Bridging Science and Community



By: [The ELHA Lab](#)

The Equity for Latinx-Hispanic Healthy Aging (ELHA Lab) is driven by Dr. Mirella Díaz-Santos's vision of increasing equitable access to dementia care and clinical trials within the Spanish and English-speaking Latino/a/e/x (hereby, Latino) communities in Los Angeles County. Our mission emphasizes civic engagement and community-engaged research with local Latino leaders to address disparities in risk reduction, early detection, accurate diagnosis, access to care, and clinical trials for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD).

Our journey began in 2022 with a stark realization at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic: equitable ADRD care, along with access to innovative clinical trials, was shattered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many lost family members with ADRD. Caregivers and families were isolated and trying to navigate a broken healthcare system by themselves.

The urgency of our mission was underscored by the reality of COVID-19, the impact of social isolation on brain-mental health, and the standing statistics showing that older Latinos are about 1.5 times more likely to develop ADRD compared to non-Latino whites. Despite this heightened risk, Latinos continue to face barriers to early diagnosis and access to appropriate treatment and support services. When adding the determinants of language, race, and immigration to the equation, access to ADRD care weakens.

To confront these challenges, we have adopted a multifaceted science-based approach centered on meaningful engagement and community partnerships. Through in-person engagements at local events and digital platforms, we engage Los Angeles County's Spanish and English-speaking Latino constituents. Our team is trained to engage in bidirectional conversations, ranging from the impact of healthy lifestyle behaviors in neuroplasticity and cognitive reserve to the identification of cognitive changes to the methods of gathering personal data on cognitive changes and how to engage the medical providers with the data during a wellness visit.

Another pivotal initiative of our ELHA lab involves integrating a bilingual (Spanish-English)-bicultural dementia screening toolkit into primary care clinics in partnership with UCLA Neurology and UCLA Family Health Center. This strategy aims to enhance early detection rates among Latino UCLA Health patients, facilitating timely interventions and referrals. The impact is tangible, with over 1,900 patients screened for memory loss and dementia since the implementation of the screening toolkit, showcasing the effectiveness of culturally sensitive healthcare interventions.

While progress is evident, challenges persist. Many Latino individuals do not have equitable access to UCLA Health in Westwood – where innovative and cutting-edge equipment and treatments reside. While UCLA Health’s leadership tackles this structural barrier to care, our communities deserve to be informed and empowered with resources and connections. To address this, our engagement and retention efforts began to leverage digital platforms. We launched our digital media engagement program in October 2023 via Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) and through our Spanish-language website, <https://elhalab.org>, extending the reach of educational initiatives beyond physical events. These platforms broaden our network, enabling engagement with the community beyond LA County.



With over 30 community partnerships, the ELHA lab remains steadfast in its mission to enhance access to equitable, culture and language congruent, dementia care, including ADRD clinical trials. In the era of approved and emerging disease modifying therapies and other non-pharmaceutical interventions, the Latino communities in Los Angeles County – representing approximately 49% of the population – deserve equitable access to care.

Together, we can change the number of “1.5 times more likely to develop ADRD than non-Hispanic whites.”

For more information about the ELHA lab, please visit: [ABC7 News + ELHA Lab](#), [UCLA Health + Dr. Díaz-Santos \(2021\)](#), [UCLA Health + ELHA Lab \(2023\)](#)

Follow us @ELHAUCLA



New Addition to the Easton Center

Please join us in welcoming a new staff member to the Easton Center.



Photo: [Dorothy Lie, BA](#), Executive Assistant to the Easton Center Director

Dorothy received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communications and minor in Marketing from University of Southern California in 2022. Before joining the Easton team, Dorothy was a Marketing Specialist based in San Diego. In her role, she will work with Dr. Jason Hinman to maintain daily operations at the Mary S. Easton Center for Alzheimer's Research and Care at UCLA.

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Clinical Research Opportunities

If you would like to advance Alzheimer's disease research, please consider being a study participant. Below are the current recruiting trials. For a complete list of enrolling studies, visit our website at <https://eastonad.ucla.edu/>.

OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES:

- [Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative 4 \(ADNI4\) Protocol](#)
- [Alzheimer's Disease Research Center - Biomarkers in Neurodegenerative Disease \(ADRC-BIND\)](#)
- [ARTFL-LEFFTDS Longitudinal Frontotemporal Lobar Degeneration \(ALLFTD\)](#)
- [Dementia Research, Education, and Advancement in Los Angeles \(DREAM-LA\)](#)
- [The Harbor-UCLA and UCLA Medical Center Research Focus Group Study](#)
- [The Relationship of Hate to Dehumanization: An Exploration in Neurotypical and Frontotemporal Dementia \(FTD Hate Study\)](#)
- [Music Stimulation to Improve Cognition \(MUSIC\)](#)
- [National Institute on Aging Alzheimer's Disease Family Based Study \(NIA-AD-FBS\)](#)

INTERVENTIONAL STUDIES:

- [CELIA Study](#)
- [Modulating Memory with Low-Intensity Focused Ultrasound \(LIFUP-MCIAD\)](#)
- [SUVEN Study](#)

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For more information on our upcoming lectures and events, please visit the Easton Center [Community Calendar](#).

Brain Health and Alzheimer's Prevention Presentation

Date: Saturday, April 20, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM (PDT)

Location: Montebello Senior Citizen Center

115 S. Taylor Avenue

Montebello, CA 90640

The ELHA Lab will return to Montebello's Senior Citizen Center to engage the Latino Senior Club's members in a more in-depth conversation to address misconceptions about aging and Alzheimer's disease.

Better Caregiving for All:

Long-Distance Caregivers of Persons Living with Dementia

Date: Wednesday, April 24, 2024

Time: 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM (PDT)

Platform: Virtual/Zoom

The UCLA Alzheimer's and Dementia Care (ADC) Program presents *Better Caregiving for All*, a new monthly virtual series accessible via Zoom and will be delivered live and recorded for on-demand viewing. The material covered each month will address the needs of populations that have not been the focus of traditional caregiver training/education in the past. Each session will include a local content expert and caregivers who will share their knowledge and experience in that population of dementia caregiving. This month's topic is Long-Distance Caregivers of Persons Living with Dementia (Long-distance caregiving is defined as living an hour or more away from the care recipient). Moderator Linda Ercoli, PhD, guest expert Yael Wyte, MSW.

Registration: https://uclahs.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b76NX0NLHVJCKN0

University of the West Free Health Fair

Date: Saturday, May 4, 2024

Time: 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM (PDT)

Location: University of the West

1409 Walnut Grove Avenue

Rosemead, CA 91770

The Easton Center is excited to join Asian Pacific American Health C.A.R.E. (APAHC) at the University of the West's Free Health Fair on Saturday, May 4, 2024. This event is sponsored by the University of the West, Fo Guang Shan Hsi Lai Temple (佛光山西來寺), APAHC, and the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health.

Dr. Timothy Chang will present "The Myths and FAQs of Alzheimer's Disease" in English, and Nancy Osuch will translate the slides to Mandarin "關於阿茲海默病的誤解和常見問題." Additional materials will be available at the Easton Center table. FREE health and dementia screenings, including short

cognitive tests, will be offered by APAHC and the UCLA volunteer faculty/medical students/nursing students. [\[Flyer\]](#)

For more information, please call **(626) 571-8811** or email: event@uwest.edu.

Little Tokyo Service Center Health Fair

Date: Saturday, May 11, 2024

Time: 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM (PDT)

Location: Terasaki Budokan

249 S. Los Angeles Street

Los Angeles, CA 90012

The Easton Center is excited to join Asian Pacific American Health C.A.R.E. (APAHC) and the UCLA volunteer faculty and nursing students at the Little Tokyo Service Center Health Fair on Saturday, May 11, 2024, to provide FREE health and dementia screenings, including short cognitive tests. Additional materials will be available at our booth. [\[Flyer\]](#)

2024 Faith and Health Luncheon

Date: Thursday, May 16, 2024

Time: 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM (PDT)

Location: West Angeles Cathedral

3600 Crenshaw Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90016

In partnership with Alzheimer’s Los Angeles, the Mary S. Easton Center for Alzheimer’s Research and Care at UCLA is excited to host the 16th Annual Faith & Health Luncheon, bringing together leaders and members from over a dozen Black/African American churches. Gather with people and organizations working together to connect with the Black/African American community about Alzheimer’s and other dementias and learn about the many community resources available. [\[Flyer\]](#)

Community Educational Forum with Alzheimer’s Association

Date: Wednesday, May 29, 2024

Time: 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM (PDT)

Location: Alma Family Services Family & Youth Services Center

3218 Wabash Avenue

Los Angeles, CA 90063

Join the ELHA Lab and our partners with the Alzheimer’s Association for this collaborative community educational forum. We’ll discuss the importance of practicing healthy habits to increase brain health and reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s disease.

Alzheimer's Los Angeles Caregiver Wellness Day

Date: Thursday, May 30, 2024

Time: 9:00 AM – 12:30 PM (PDT)

Location: Audrey Irmas Pavilion

3643 Wilshire Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90010

Alzheimer's Los Angeles's Caregiver Wellness Days provide family caregivers with a free day of rest, relaxation, and access to resources! Each event includes presentations, workshops, exhibitors, and wellness activities. The Mary S. Easton Center will have a booth and educational materials at this event.

Registration: <https://www.alzheimersla.org/for-families/activities-and-workshops/caregiver-wellness-day/#current>

The South Bay Dementia Education Consortium

Presents - Dementia Diagnosis Unveiled

Date: Wednesday, June 5, 2024

Time: 3:00 PM – 4:00 PM (PDT)

Platform: Virtual/Zoom

Gaining a proper diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease or another type of dementia can be a long and winding road. This presentation will have UCLA and community clinicians explain their unique yet complementary roles in providing a proper diagnosis and will provide attendees with tools to navigate the road of a dementia diagnosis.

Registration: <https://uclahs.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMtf-6orDivGdx29N24sB0Z-8fBfB9bReK4>

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