When Alzheimer’s Drugs Arrive—How Prepared Will We Be to Meet Demand?

AN ASSESSMENT OF U.S. HEALTH CARE INFRASTRUCTURE

Early intervention is the key

Since no drug has thus far been shown to reverse established Alzheimer’s dementia, halting progression at early stages of the disease is the most likely pathway. There is hope that one or more drug therapies, including infused drugs, may become available by the year 2020. At that point, a complex patient journey will start—sending those over the age of 55 on a four-part path, involving various specialists with multiple appointments at different facilities to:

1. Screen for mild cognitive impairment (MCI)
2. Evaluate for potential Alzheimer’s disease
3. Test for signs of brain pathology, and
4. Treat with intravenous (IV) infusion therapy.

Ideally, this process would happen as quickly as possible to prevent progression, but is the U.S. health care system ready? Our projections based on the simulation model suggest otherwise.

Millions of patients would need to be seen

By 2020, 33 million infusions might be needed.

Wait times might be extensive

Of the 88.4 million people 55 years and older who are eligible, 70.7 million would get screened in a doctor’s office. Of the 14.9 million who screen positive for MCI, 7.5 million would see a dementia specialist for evaluation. 6.7 million would get amyloid biomarker testing. 3.0 million might test positive for amyloid deposits and return to the specialist to learn about treatment.

It could take more than a dozen years to clear the backlog of cases. Patients could face more than a 14-month wait for their first appointment with a specialist.

At the peak of its demand, waits for amyloid testing could exceed 11 months.

Delays in access to care could result in people getting sicker

Action is needed to reduce capacity constraints

Want more providers in dementia care and develop tools to make them more efficient

Expand the range of diagnostic options

Utilize all options for infusion therapy including the home setting

Ensure appropriate coverage of services and tests

Images: Kamaga/GettyImages, and Noun Project