Alexander Disease

Alexander disease is a rare genetic, degenerative disorder of the nervous system. It is one of a group of genetic disorders called the leukodystrophies. These affect growth of the myelin sheath. It is the fatty covering which acts as an insulator on nerve fibers in the brain. Alexander disease affects mostly males. It is usually not *genetic* (does not come from parents). It begins at about 6 months of age. In addition to the infant form, juvenile and adult onset forms of the disorder have been reported. These forms occur less often. They also progress more slowly.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may include:

- Mental and physical retardation.
- Confusion and/or loss of memory (*dementia*).
- Enlargement of the brain and head.
- Stiffness of arms and/or legs (*spasticity*).
- Convulsions (*seizures*).

TREATMENT

There is no cure for Alexander disease. There is no standard course of treatment. Treatment of Alexander disease is according to the symptoms.

The likely outcome (*prognosis*) for individuals with Alexander disease is generally poor. Most children with the infant form do not survive past the age of 6. In the juvenile form, death usually occurs within 10 years after the beginning of symptoms.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS supports research on genetic disorders. This includes leukodystrophies, such as Alexander disease. The goals of this research are to find ways to prevent, treat, and, ultimately, cure these disorders.

Research is continually being done to learn more about this problem.

Provided by: The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

Document Released: 12/08/2003 Document Re-Released: 03/26/2009

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