How Prepared Are European Health Care Systems to Deliver a Future Alzheimer’s Treatment?

As the populations of European nations age, the devastating burden of Alzheimer’s disease on patients and families looms. The prevalence of the disease is expected to double between 2015 and 2050. Yet recent clinical trials give hope that a disease-modifying therapy might become available soon. The therapy would treat early-stage patients to prevent or delay the progression to dementia. When this therapy becomes available, are European health systems prepared to deliver it?
AN ASSESSMENT OF HEALTH CARE INFRASTRUCTURE IN FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY, SPAIN, SWEDEN, AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

A therapy for early-stage disease means that millions of patients would need care

Recent clinical trials offer hope that an Alzheimer’s disease-modifying therapy may become available soon. The therapy would treat the disease at an early stage to prevent or delay the progression to dementia.

A RAND study used simulation modeling to assess the health care system capacity to evaluate, test, and treat expected patients in six countries that represent 65 percent of the population in the European Union (EU). The analysis looked at a scenario in which a therapy is available in 2020 and is delivered monthly to patients with MCI due to Alzheimer’s disease.

Wait times for specialist visits and infusion therapy could delay access to care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAXIMUM WAITING TIME BASED ON THEORETICAL CAPACITY</th>
<th>Dementia specialist visits</th>
<th>Infusion therapy</th>
<th>First year with no wait times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>&gt;12 months</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>2033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>No wait</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>2030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>6–12 months</td>
<td>2040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>6–12 months</td>
<td>6–12 months</td>
<td>2044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>6–12 months</td>
<td>2036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>&gt;12 months</td>
<td>6–12 months</td>
<td>2042</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Delays in care could result in more than 1 million patients developing Alzheimer’s dementia while waiting for evaluation and treatment between 2020 and 2050.

NOTE: There are no waiting times for biomarker testing if cerebrospinal fluid assays are used for 90 percent of testing and positron emission tomography scans are used for 10 percent of testing.

Policies and planning could help increase capacity

Establish graduated clinical pathways to screen for cognitive impairment and develop better detection tools.

Utilise dedicated outpatient infusion centers in collaboration with hospitals, memory clinics, and other facilities.

Ensure appropriate reimbursement of services.

Create EU-wide guidance and best practices for coordinated and timely care.

A combination of reimbursement, regulatory, and workforce planning policies and innovation in diagnosis and treatment delivery is needed to expand capacity and to ensure that available capacity is leveraged optimally to treat patients with early-stage Alzheimer’s disease.
ITALY: EXPECTED PATIENTS AND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM CAPACITY

Millions of patients could seek diagnosis and treatment

Of the 20.6 million people age 55 and older in 2019, 16.4 million could seek screening in a doctor’s office. Of the 2.9 million who screen positive for MCI, 1.4 million could seek a dementia specialist for evaluation (there are 9,501 neurologists, geriatricians, and geriatric psychiatrists, or 16.0 specialists per 100,000 people).

1.3 million could be referred for biomarker testing. In 2020, 5.8 million infusions might be needed; wait times for infusions persist for years.

0.6 million might test positive for biomarkers and return to the specialist to learn about treatment. Of the 2.9 million who screen positive for MCI, 1.4 million could seek a dementia specialist for evaluation. Of the 20.6 million people age 55 and older in 2019, 16.4 million could seek screening in a doctor’s office.

Wait times might be extensive for infusion therapy

Average wait times in months

Adequate training and reimbursement for specialist evaluations are needed to ensure that capacity is utilised. While on wait lists, 146,000 people might develop Alzheimer’s dementia while waiting for evaluation and treatment.

No waits for biomarker testing because of the use of cerebrospinal fluid assays.