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New Guidelines Identify Best Treatments to Help ALS Patients Live Longer, Easier

ST. PAUL, Minn -- October 12, 2009 -- New guidelines from the American Academy of Neurology identify the most effective treatments for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig's disease. The guidelines are published in the October 13 print issue of *Neurology*.

"While we are waiting for a cure, people need to know that a lot can be done to make life easier and longer for people with ALS," said lead guidelines author Robert G. Miller, MD, Department of Neurology, California Pacific Medical Center, San Francisco, California.

According to the guidelines, the drug riluzole should be offered to people with ALS to slow the rate at which the disease progresses.

The guideline also states that life expectancy will likely increase and quality of life may increase for people with ALS who use an assisted-breathing device.

Longer life expectancy is also likely for people with ALS who use a feeding tube (PEG tube), since nutrition plays a critical role in prolonging survival.

The guidelines also recommend doctors consider offering their patients botulinum toxin B to treat sialorrhea if oral medications do not help.

Moreover, doctors should consider screening their patients for behavioral or thinking problems because studies show many people with ALS have these problems. Such problems might affect some patients' willingness to accept suggested treatments.

"Important treatments available for people with ALS are often not suggested by doctors and not used by patients," said Dr. Miller. "It's important that people with ALS know that more treatments are now available to ease the burden of the disease and that they should see neurologists who are aware of these new guidelines and follow them."

In addition, the guidelines recommend people with ALS enroll early in a specialized multidisciplinary ALS clinic to optimize care. "Attending a multidisciplinary clinic will likely increase survival and access to treatments, and may improve quality of life," said Miller.

SOURCE: American Academy of Neurology