Lilly to Acquire Alzheimer's Imaging Agents from Siemens

In a move to shore up its lead in Alzheimer's diagnostics, Eli Lilly and Co on Wednesday said it will acquire two imaging agents from Siemens designed to light up brain deposits of tau, an Alzheimer's protein linked with cell death.

The two agents are radiopharmaceutical tracers, which are used with positron emission tomography, or PET scans, to highlight specific proteins in the brain. Terms of the deal with the conglomerate's Siemens Medical Solutions USA unit were not disclosed.

In April 2012, Lilly became the first company to win U.S. marketing approval for use of its radioactive tracer known as Amyvid to detect the presence of brain plaques made up of the protein beta amyloid, an early sign of Alzheimer's disease.

Lilly said it plans to use the new technology first in its research and development programs as it works to develop treatments that fight the build-up of amyloid and tau, two proteins that are believed to be hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease.

Lilly also has the option to commercialize the tracers, which are meant to be used with PET scanners.

There are currently no approved diagnostics that can detect tau in living patients, which makes research difficult. Typically detected during an autopsy, tau is known for forming tangles in the brain and is believed to develop later in the progression of Alzheimer's, when the disease has begun to kill off brain cells.

Lilly said validation and development of the tracers will be handled by a team at Avid Radiopharmaceuticals, Lilly's wholly

owned subsidiary focused on molecular imaging.

So far, no drug has been found to prevent the advance of Alzheimer’s, the leading cause of dementia that now affects some 5 million Americans and 38 million people worldwide.

Lilly is developing a number of experimental Alzheimer’s treatments, including solanezumab, which is now being tested in a number of trials among patients with very early Alzheimer’s.

(Editing by Maureen Bavdek)
