

Alzheimer Association International Conference 2016

The Alzheimer's Association International Conference (AAIC) meeting was held July 23-28 in Toronto, Canada. AAIC is the world's largest forum for the dementia research community. This year the conference gathered around 5000 researchers from academia and industry. As for previous years, there was also a large exhibition where pharmaceutical, medical device companies and other players active in the field were present.

Such a large conference covers many different topics but research around how to effectively treat Alzheimer's disease (AD) was as usual one of the main topics. While amyloid (A β) plaques and amyloid imaging was a central theme a few years ago, there is now a clear shift towards tau and many of the imaging sessions discussed tau imaging with PET. The hypothesis is that A β is upstream of tau in AD pathogenesis and triggers the conversion of tau from a normal to a toxic state. This doesn't change the role of amyloid and most researchers still believe that anti-amyloid treatments, if used in an early stage, have the potential to slow down or halt the disease process.

Moving AD treatment to very early disease stages was a second central theme of the conference. There were, for example, initial reports from enrollment of subjects into the A4 study. The A4 study is a clinical trial for older individuals who may be at risk for AD but who do not experience any memory or cognitive problems (i.e., they are healthy when assessed with cognitive tests). The challenge for all studies in early disease stages is how to enroll individuals in a cost effective way. This will become even more challenging if/when a disease modifying drug is approved. As a senior executive for a pharmaceutical company put it: "physicians that today shy away from diagnosing dementia will have to decide which individuals to put on the new drugs. This is one of the top concerns for us".

With the above in mind it is clear that the work in PredictND is very important. Finding the right patient in the right disease stage will become more and more important. There were also several researchers from the PredictND partners present at AAIC and there were two papers presented. Wiesje van der Flier presented a poster with the topic "Cost effective differential diagnostics of neurodegenerative diseases using a stratified approach" and Jyrki Lötjönen had an oral presentation with the title "Towards data-driven medicine in differential diagnostics of neurodegenerative diseases". Both presentations were well received and are perfectly aligned with the problem of early diagnostics outlined above.

The AAIC conference is also a great place for networking and PredictND partners had several meetings around potential exploitation of the PredictND technology. Meetings were held with two pharma companies and with several medical device / biomarkers companies. The main point was to raise awareness of the PredictND technology but there will be follow up discussions based on some of these initial meetings.

In summary, AAIC 2016 was a great meeting and we are already now looking forward to AAIC 2017 which will be held in London July 15-20.