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Media Contacts:

Angela Babb, (651) 695-2789, ababb@aan.com
Rachel Seroka, (651) 695-2738, rseroka@aan.com
AAN Press Room 179B (April 12–18): (312) 791-7053

Oral Drug, FTY720, Reduces Disease Activity in Multiple Sclerosis

CHICAGO – A drug that can be taken orally reduces the number of attacks people with multiple sclerosis (MS) have, according to research that will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology 60th Anniversary Annual Meeting in Chicago, April 12–19, 2008.

“All of the current treatments for MS must be injected, so having a pill you can swallow with a glass of water would be a welcome improvement for many people,” said study author Giancarlo Comi, MD, of Vita-Salute San Raffaele University in Milan, Italy.

The results reported are from an extension of a six-month study with 281 people with relapsing MS, two-thirds of whom took the drug FTY720 (fingolimod) and one-third of whom took a placebo. After six months, those taking FTY720 had more than 50 percent fewer relapses, or attacks, than those who took the placebo. At that point, all of the participants could enter an ongoing extension of the study where all would receive the drug.

A total of 173 people have finished three-years of the study. Continuous use of the drug led to sustained low relapses, with more than 67 percent of the participants remaining free of relapses after three years. In addition, the inflammatory activity associated with MS, as assessed by MRI scans, remained low, with 89 percent of patients free of disease activity and 75 percent of patients free of new or newly enlarged lesions.

“The first line treatments for MS, beta interferon and glatiramer acetate, reduce the relapse rate by only about 30 percent, so this is a significant development for people with MS,” Comi said.

The most frequently reported side effects of the drug were headache, fatigue, flu, and cold symptoms.

FTY720 is an immune-modulating drug that binds to a receptor site on immune cells, sequestering them in the lymph nodes. As a result, FTY720 reduces their ability to cause damage associated with the symptoms experienced by people with MS.

The study was supported by Novartis Pharma AG, maker of FTY720.

The American Academy of Neurology, an association of over 21,000 neurologists and neuroscience professionals, is dedicated to improving patient care through education and research. A neurologist is a doctor with specialized training in diagnosing, treating and managing disorders of the brain and nervous system such as Alzheimer’s disease, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease, and stroke. For more information about the American Academy of Neurology, visit www.aan.com.

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60TH ANNUAL MEETING

APRIL 12–19, 2008



NEWS RELEASE

Editor's Note: Dr. Comi will present this research during a scientific platform session at 3:45 p.m. CT/4:45 p.m. ET, on Tuesday, April 15, 2008, in Room 196 of the McCormick Place West Convention Center.

He will be available for media questions during a press briefing at 11:00 a.m. CT/12:00 p.m. ET, on Tuesday, April 15, 2008, in the on-site Press Interview Room, room 182.

If you are a member of the media interested in listening to the press briefing via conference call, please call the AAN Press Room (April 12 – 18) at (312) 791-7053.

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