In the news

A BLOOD TEST FOR ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE?

A study published in *Nature Medicine* has identified a potential blood-based biomarker for Alzheimer's disease. Specifically, the level of a set of 10 lipids predicted, with an accuracy of over 90%, whether or not an older individual would develop mild cognitive impairment or Alzheimer's disease within 2–3 years.

"These findings are potentially very exciting," says Simon Lovestone, a neuroscientist at the University of Oxford, UK (*Nature News*, 9 Mar 2014). Simon Ridley of the charity Alzheimer's Research UK notes that "detecting the disease at this pre-symptomatic stage has so far proved difficult" and that "a blood test to identify people at risk of Alzheimer's would be a real step forward for research" (*Guardian*, 9 Mar 2014). In addition, "the preclinical state of the disease offers a window of opportunity for timely disease-modifying intervention", says study author Howard Federoff (*Guardian*, 9 Mar 2014).

Having a test that detects Alzheimer's disease before any clinical symptoms appear would raise important ethical issues. "If this does develop in the future people must be given a choice about whether they would want to know, and fully understand the implications," according to Doug Brown of the Alzheimer's Society (*BBC News*, 9 Mar 2014). Study author Mark Mapstone says: "We may not have any therapy yet but there are things we can do — we can get out financial and legal affairs in order, plan for future care, and inform family members." (*New Scientist*, 9 Mar 2014).

Before these issues become a reality, the results "require replication and validation by other scientists in larger and more diverse populations", according to Maria Carrillo of the Alzheimer's Association (*WebMD*, 9 Mar 2014), especially in light of the currently limited sensitivity and specificity of the test.

Leonie Welberg

CORRECTION

The second sentence of the original version of this In the news article could be interpreted in several ways. The sentence has now been corrected to remove any ambiguity.