

Alzheimer's disease remains one of the most challenging, costly and emotionally devastating neurological conditions. Over 6 million Americans currently live with the Alzheimer's, which is projected to rise to nearly 13 million by 2050. Diagnosis has relied primarily on clinical evaluation, cognitive testing and exclusion of other causes of dementia, often leading to diagnostic uncertainty or delays in rural communities with limited access to specialty neurology care.

The Transformative Role of Amyloid PET Imaging

Amyloid positron emission tomography (PET) imaging allows clinicians to directly visualize amyloid plaque accumulation in the brain—one of the disease's hallmark pathological features—providing a level of diagnostic certainty previously unavailable in routine clinical practice. Following the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval of amyloid PET imaging in 2023, Deaconess Illinois Union County Hospital developed a comprehensive Alzheimer's testing pathway for patients in Southern Illinois in partnership with Hornik Neuroscience Associates (HNA), a specialized neurology practice.

With early accurate diagnosis critical for patients, made possible by the new amyloid PET imaging, Deaconess' coordinated approach offers individuals with memory concerns, mild cognitive impairment, or early dementia symptoms definitive diagnostic evaluation locally, which reduces the need for long-distance travel and expedites clinical decision-making.

Linking Diagnosis to Disease-Modifying Treatment

Deaconess also worked with HNA to pair amyloid PET imaging with new FDA-approved disease-modifying monoclonal antibody infusions (lecanemab and donanemab) to slow the decline in patients with early Alzheimer's disease and provide a seamless continuum of care from diagnosis through long-term management. This coordinated model ensures:

- Appropriate patient selection based on amyloid PET confirmation;
- Ongoing neurological oversight and treatment monitoring;
- Structured MRI surveillance for treatment-related imaging changes; and
- Close coordination among neurology, radiology, pharmacy, and infusion services.

Expanding Access and Equity in Rural Communities

By offering amyloid PET imaging and infusion-based Alzheimer's therapies locally, Deaconess has reduced barriers to care for a historically underserved population. Patients and their families benefit from earlier diagnostic clarity, improved care planning, and access to treatments once available only at large academic medical centers. Receiving care closer to home also improves adherence, reduces caregiver burden and enhances overall quality of life.

A Scalable Model for the Future of Alzheimer's Care

This is a scalable, system-based model demonstrates that rural hospitals can successfully adopt cutting-edge diagnostics and therapies while maintaining high standards of safety and clinical excellence. HNA provides expert neurological evaluation, longitudinal disease management, and treatment oversight, while Deaconess delivers advanced imaging, infusion services, and patient-centered operational support. Through a shared commitment to innovation, collaboration, and patient-centered care, Deaconess and HNA are helping redefine what's possible for Alzheimer's care in rural Illinois.

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