MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGHS
RESEARCH SUMMARY

TOPIC: HIGHER RATES OF ALS IN VETERANS
REPORT: **MB #4684**

BACKGROUND: ALS or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the spinal cord and brain. The Greek root of the name translates to mean no muscle nourishment, which leads to the muscle wasting away or atrophy. As the spinal cord nerve cells degenerate, it can lead to scarring or hardening in the region. There are two different types of ALS, sporadic and familial. Sporadic is the most common form and accounts for up to 95% of all cases. Familial means the disease is inherited. In these families, there is a 50% chance each offspring will inherit the gene mutation and develop the disease.
(Source: http://www.alsa.org/about-als/what-is-als.html)

SYMPTOMS/DIAGNOSING: Initial symptoms can vary for different people. Someone may have trouble grasping items like pens, or lifting their coffee cup. Others may experience a change in vocal pitch when speaking. The rate these symptoms and ALS overall progresses can be quite variable from one person to the next, but the median survival time is three to five years. Symptoms may begin in the muscles that control speech, swallowing, or even in the hands, arms, legs or feet. Progressive muscle weakness and paralysis are universally experienced. It is difficult to diagnose early as it can mimic other neurological diseases. Tests to rule out other conditions may include nerve conduction studies, MRI's, EMG's, muscle biopsy's or spinal taps, as well as blood and urine tests.
(Source: http://www.alsa.org/about-als/symptoms.html
https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/amyotrophic-lateral-sclerosis/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20354027)

TREATMENT AND RESEARCH: Treatment can't reverse the damage, but it can slow progression of symptoms, prevent complications, and make you feel more independent and comfortable. An integrated team of doctors trained in many different areas may work together to provide you with proper care. Medications may be prescribed; two that are approved for ALS treatment include Riluzole (Rilutek) or Edaravone (Radicava). One is taken orally, and shown to increase life expectancy by three to six months. The second is given by intravenous infusion; its effect on life span isn't known yet but it's been shown to reduce the decline in daily functioning. You may also receive different therapies, such as physical, occupational, breathing care, nutritional support or speech therapy. Clinical studies are constantly taking place to further search for better treatment and a cure. Recently, it's been concluded that the number of patients diagnosed with ALS who are war veterans is double the amount of civilian patients diagnosed with ALS. The VA, in conjunction with research teams, is working to determine the connection, in hopes it could lead to a breakthrough in the treatment. If you are a veteran and you've been diagnosed with ALS contact your local VA hospital for more information.
(Source: https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/amyotrophic-lateral-sclerosis/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20354027
Dr. Verma)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS REPORT, PLEASE CONTACT:

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If this story or any other Ivanhoe story has impacted your life or prompted you or someone you know to seek or change treatments, please let us know by contacting Marjorie Bekaert Thomas at mthomas@ivanhoe.com