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Menopausal Night Sweats Linked with Cognitive Dysfunction

New study suggests paradox of night sweats increasing sleep duration while impairing cognitive performance

CLEVELAND, Ohio (September 24, 2019)—Experts frequently tout the value of a good night’s sleep. However, a new study casts doubt on the value of sleep time suggesting that women who experience night sweats are more vulnerable to cognitive dysfunction as their sleep duration increases. These paradoxical study results will be presented during The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) Annual Meeting in Chicago, September 25-28, 2019.

Previous studies have demonstrated the association between daytime hot flashes and worse memory performance. In this new study involving women with a history of breast cancer, however, researchers focused on night sweats and how they relate to total sleep time. Surprisingly, more frequent night sweats were associated with greater sleep duration. Even more ironic, however, was the finding that these same women experiencing night sweats became more vulnerable to prefrontal cortex deficits, including decreased attention and executive function, as their sleep duration increased. Total sleep time, however, was unrelated to memory performance.

Separately it was determined that daytime hot flashes had no impact on total sleep time.

“This work presents novel insights into the influence of menopause symptoms on cognitive performance among women with a history of breast cancer and raises the possibility that hot flash treatments could benefit cognition in these women through effects on sleep,” says John Bark, lead author of the study from the behavioral neuroscience doctoral program at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

“Studies like this are valuable in helping healthcare providers develop effective treatment options for menopausal women complaining of cognitive decline as they focus on modifiable risk factors,” says Dr. Stephanie Faubion, NAMS medical director.

Mr. Bark and Dr. Faubion are available for interviews before the presentation at the Annual Meeting.

Founded in 1989, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is North America’s leading nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of all women during midlife and beyond through an understanding of menopause and healthy aging. Its multidisciplinary membership of 2,000 leaders in the field—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, nutrition, anthropology,

epidemiology, pharmacy, and education—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause and healthy aging. To learn more about NAMS, visit www.menopause.org.