

PRESS KIT FOR
THE HALF LIFE OF EVERYTHING
A NOVEL BY DEBORAH CAROL GANG

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SEVEN IMPORTANT POINTS OF DISTINCTIVENESS

- 1) The book's premise—that it's not impossible to imagine being on the cusp of a medical breakthrough for victims of early onset Alzheimer's—creates a marital crisis resolved in an unusual and unexpected way.
- 2) Highly recommended by three of America's best novelists: **Elinor Lipman** (New England Book Award for a body of fiction work), **Bonnie Jo Campbell** (National Book Award finalist), and **Andy Mozina** (Flannery O'Connor Prize finalist)...
- 3) They praise the novel as: "timely," "compelling," "beautifully written," "with memorable characters," "full of grace, humor, and winning characters," "employing clear and vivid prose," "artful," "one-of-a-kind," and a "remarkable debut."
- 4) The novel reminds many readers of **Anne Tyler**, which turns out not to be a surprise. As the author puts it: "I was obsessed with her writing and her stories long before I wrote a word." And Tyler, who steadfastly continues an anti-blurb campaign she began in 1986, wrote the author to "tell you directly how much I enjoyed *The Half-Life of Everything*."
- 5) The novel also raises the issue of polyamory (otherwise known as "consensual non-monogamy"), a suddenly very visible phenomenon involving as many as 10 million adult Americans today. The novel explores sexuality, frankly and relatably expressed.
- 6) The author, prior to becoming a full-time writer, was, for 30 years, a practicing psychologist and therapist specializing in family relations. A careful observer of human nature, Gang has produced a novel that's rich, deep, and full of wisdom about getting through life, love, and the related surprises that come our way.
- 7) Bancroft Press, recipient of starred reviews from Publishers Weekly, Booklist, Foreword Magazine, Kirkus Reviews, and School Library Journal, among others, is one of the top-ten indie book publishers in the U.S., and has been throughout its 27 years of existence.

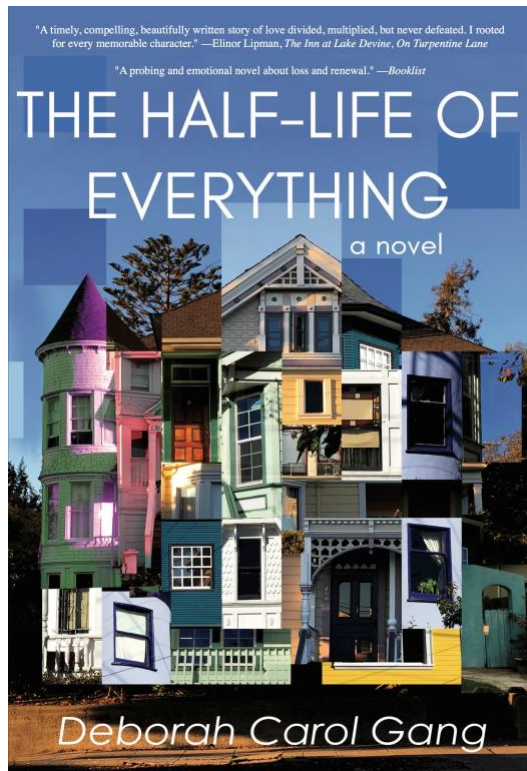
BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Half-Life of Everything, realistic in every detail except for one speculative twist, places a once happily married man in the unwelcome situation of loving two women. David, who has never been unfaithful, is prepared to make the expected sacrifice. Two strong-willed women intervene and everyone finds themselves making unexpected choices. Deborah Carol Gang's debut novel skillfully poses today's questions: Can any marriage withstand the transformation of one partner into a lost and helpless child? When does a marriage end? What ultimately does one spouse owe the other? This lyrical and slightly off-kilter story refines those questions, ultimately finding answers in the often unexplored but fertile ground of friendship.

BRIEFER OVERVIEW

A fiftysomething, happily married man loses his wife to illness. She's alive but she's gone. He finally starts to wonder: *What's a married widower supposed to do?* Happiness enters his life again—but with complications. Major complications.

PRAISE FOR DEBORAH CAROL GANG'S *HALF-LIFE OF EVERYTHING*



“Gang’s probing and emotional novel about loss, recovery, and renewal follows a messily imperfect family through some of the most difficult and rewarding years of their lives. Her grounded prose echoes the weight of the family’s hardest decisions, with a style reminiscent of Anne Tyler and Diane Chamberlain. Full of life and love, Gang’s debut novel is heartwarming and genuine.”

—BOOKLIST

“A timely, compelling, beautifully written story of love divided, multiplied, but never defeated. I rooted for every one of Deborah Carol Gang’s memorable characters.”

—ELINOR LIPMAN, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF NUMEROUS NOVELS, INCLUDING *ON TURPENTINE LANE*, *THE VIEW FROM PENTHOUSE B*, AND *THE INN AT LAKE DEVINE*

“Oh the humanity! Deborah Carol Gang’s crisp debut novel shows how, with a little luck, decent people

making smart, careful choices can nonetheless careen into troubled new landscapes. Enjoy the ride and the charming company as this what-if story banks and swerves and carries you safely home.”

—BONNIE JO CAMPBELL, AUTHOR OF *AMERICAN SALVAGE*, A NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST, AND WINNER OF THE 2019 MARK TWAIN AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED CONTRIBUTIONS TO MIDWESTERN LITERATURE

“Venturing into uneasy yet truthful territory, *The Half-Life of Everything* explores David’s perspective and the frustrated sadness of his current situation. Only in his late fifties, he misses the physical and mental intimacy of his marriage. Kate, who’s afflicted with early onset Alzheimer’s, politely acknowledges his visits but offers little actual connection. He questions his fidelity and integrity, yet he still feels like he is in limbo—not divorced or widowed and free to pursue other relationships, but yearning for more than the shadowy void of Kate’s absence. Though David does find Jane, an understanding new romantic partner, the story develops with quiet finesse beyond their involvement. Kate’s trial medication begins to show remarkable results, and she finds herself returning to a life she once knew quite well, although both she and that life have changed. Through its shifting narrative and quirky, engaging characters, *The Half-Life of Everything* balances humor, candor, melancholy, and warmth. While Kate’s Alzheimer’s battle is integral to the plot, it is her recovery from the condition and her cautiously determined reentry into being herself that create the curious future no one expected her to have.”

—FOREWORD REVIEWS

“Has a novel ever burned so brightly with decency, common sense, and love in the face of fate’s cruel medical tricks as *The Half-Life of Everything*? I don’t think so. This is a one-of-a-kind

book, full of grace, humor, and winning characters. The meanings of marriage, fidelity, and love itself are up for grabs, and Deborah Carol Gang's clear and vivid prose juggles them artfully. A remarkable debut."

—ANDY MOZINA, A FINALIST FOR THE FLANNERY O'CONNOR PRIZE, AND AUTHOR OF *CONTRARY MOTION* (BOOKLIST STARRED REVIEW)

"I loved this book. The characterization is effortless, the writing full of some truly remarkable and beautiful images, and the plot intriguing and well-paced without slipping into melodrama. In short, practically a perfect novel!"

—AUDREY MAREK, CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Q&A WITH DEBORAH CAROL GANG, AUTHOR OF *THE HALF-LIFE OF EVERYTHING*

1. What was your inspiration for *The Half-Life of Everything*?

Some years ago, I heard a top-of-the-news-hour tidbit on NPR about the results of yet another research study for an Alzheimer's drug. This treatment sounded like it might actually be the one, and while I knew that wasn't likely, I did start to think: What if? What if there could be a treatment? What if people could come back?



2. Why did you want to write *The Half-Life of Everything*? What are some of the main ideas that you want readers to take away from this novel?

When I was a kid, I loved old movies about a husband or wife long thought dead (in that era, usually from a shipwreck) who returns to find their spouse has remarried. At first I just wanted to conjecture about what could happen if a person came back from a catastrophic illness of the mind. I didn't decide until fairly far into the novel what David would do. Or what any of them would do. When I started, I didn't realize what a key figure Kate would turn out to be. So I wrote partly out of curiosity to learn how this unlikely but interesting problem could be solved.

3. What was the hardest part about writing *The Half-Life of Everything*?

The hardest part was definitely getting started. It's one thing to have an idea, but that's an ocean away from getting those first chapters on paper. It's a frightening feeling to have basically no idea what words are going to show up on the page. I created some artificial deadlines for myself and also took several online fiction workshops with Stanford, and these provided real deadlines and great feedback from the teachers and other writers. Later, if I had been away from the project for a length of time, it was difficult to come back to the manuscript. I was worried I wouldn't like the writing or the characters and I would have to force myself to enter their world again. Luckily, I became drawn in again each time—even though there were, of course, many things to improve.

4. Despite both being in love with the same man, Jane and Kate never seem to be competing with one another. How did you manage to keep Jane and Kate on equal footing and avoid turning *The Half-Life of Everything* into a glorified love triangle?

Jane, from the first time she meets David, defers to the legal and emotional bonds of his marriage to Kate. Even when David is ready to move on from being a “married widower,” Jane maintains that his history with Kate and the loss of his marriage need to be topics they can talk about and share. Later, Jane is resolute that she won't lie and cheat to be with David. Her ex-husband was

unfaithful to her in particularly cruel ways and she won't inflict that on anyone else. Kate first seems tempted to "pull rank" and maintain her own status as the wife. But as she realizes the impact of her absence and the strength of David and Jane's bond, she finds herself unable to accept David's attempt to go back in time and resume their version of normal. She finds that she's only capable of seeing Jane as a person in her own right and not as an intruder.

5. Additionally, although David is essentially dating two women at once, I never found myself hating him. How did you manage to keep David likable?

David is so driven by his desire to be a good man, a good teacher, a good husband and father that we want to cut him some slack. His narcissist parents did little to provide him with a secure identity; he made himself into a person he could respect. Despite working in a university setting, ripe with temptations, affairs and divorce, David kept his sights on loving Kate forever and on not ruining their lives over one of the many attractions, crushes, and even obsessions that most adults experience sometime during their married lives. We believe how completely out of character his new situation is for him—and how tormented he is. Perhaps we want him to find a way to be both good and happy.

6. If you had to pick one, who would you say is your favorite character in *The Half-Life of Everything*? Why?

That's a hard one because your characters become your family. And when you're writing a book that's not about serial killers or people who always behave badly, you've got a pretty good family that you've created. I'm probably partial to David because the book is mostly in his close third point-of-view. I get to have him say a lot of things I believe—that women share too much personal information, that people hug too much., that men also think about aging and about how they look. I like it when he realizes some of the ways he was self-centered during the "before" part of his marriage. I enjoyed his bewilderment at being loved by two women.

7. Okay, now who is the character that is most like you? Why?

Even though I used to be a therapist, I relate more to Kate than Jane, but really only to the degree that we're both organized and like a well-run household. And we like to socialize. We're conversant in science. And use a lot of Post-it notes. But that's about it. I can't imagine myself making the offer that Kate makes to David and Jane. But as Kate says: People never know ahead of time how they'll handle something new. I relate most to David as he tries to balance his enjoyment of life with his innate pessimism. Or realism. Sometimes pessimists get a bad rap—when they're actually just realists."

8. Was there ever a time when you felt like giving up on *The Half-Life of Everything*?

The times when you don't know what is going to happen next are surprisingly frightening. It's tempting to procrastinate until great ideas come to you. Eventually, you learn to let the characters infiltrate your mind (and take notes when you can) and then sit down to a blank page and start writing (and using the delete key liberally). Sometimes you can compose usable sections in your mind. I wrote a fair amount when I should have been listening to the great classical music being performed ten rows away on the stage. But often you just have to sit down and write, even though you can't imagine it will be anything worthwhile.

9. What is your absolute favorite book, and how did it influence the process of writing of *The Half-Life of Everything*?

Favorite is just not a question I can answer. I can say that I recently loved Zadie Smith's, *Swing Time*. I'm in the middle of Eric Puchner's new collection of stories called *Last Day on the Earth*. These stories are stunning. You want to put the book in another reader's hand right away. While it's necessary to read a lot of good fiction from childhood on, if you want to write, I did attempt while writing this, to avoid reading people that I might unconsciously try to emulate. Plus, you don't usually have time to read novels while you're writing one. There was one exception: I did read the wonderful book, *Billy Lynn's Long Half-Time Walk*, by Ben Fountain. I was avoiding writing physical descriptions of characters because I'd seen it done badly so many times. A writer friend wanted me to see how Fountain did it. That was great advice.

10. Who is your favorite author and why? How have they influenced your writing?

I'd forgotten this story, but my husband reminded me recently that when we met many years ago, I apparently put an Anne Tyler book in his hands and virtually ordered him to read it. He was one of those people who didn't think fiction was real enough. I still don't remember doing this but it sounds plausible. Now he comes to me every few months for his next literary fiction assignment. He'll try anything that I recommend. The aforementioned *Billy Lynn's Long Half-Time Walk* and Andy Mozina's *Contrary Motion* are two recent books that I've been most obnoxious about insisting people read. Occasionally I just mail a copy of a novel to someone if I feel certain that they'll enjoy it. People like getting gifts for no reason.

11. Do you have any special rituals when it comes to writing? Where did they come from?

Like many writers, I needed to write in the morning, though as the story became more compelling to me, I became more flexible about the time of day. I have to use a desktop computer so that anchors me to my home office. When I'm out, I've learned to put notes into my phone and email them to myself—because as we all know, if you don't write it down, it never existed. I have many 5x7 envelopes filled with notes for the novel. I can't imagine why I'm keeping them.

12. I have to ask: Did you ever consider an alternative ending to *The Half-Life of Everything*? Perhaps one where Kate relapses?

For me, the menace of her relapse is almost a character in the book and I thought it was more effective to maintain it as a threat. The story of three people trying to figure out happiness is the one that's most interesting to me.

13. In your opinion, what is the most emotional moment of *The Half-Life of Everything*?

The reunion when David visits Kate for the first time in some weeks always gets to me—that they could cry to the point of exhaustion and yet also find some humor in their situation seemed plausible for these two people. Readers tell me they cry at that scene. I know I have.

14. Is there a hero of *The Half-Life of Everything*? Who is it and why?

The way that Kate comes to understand her illness and recovery and the current life she's been handed is pivotal for me. I admire her self-esteem and self-confidence in knowing how she wanted to be loved and her determination that David not be forced into the role of the "good husband" martyr. I liked her willingness to stand up to her sons as well as to other people rather than return to a life that now felt false to her.

15. What did you learn from writing *The Half-Life of Everything* and how does this lesson appear in the novel?

My husband and I have small and *not very close families*, which of course makes other relationships so important. I've always understood the importance of friends, but writing this story helped me to consider some unconventional possibilities and depths to the word friendship. It's a lovely word when you think about it.

16. What about *The Half-Life of Everything* makes you proud? Is there a specific line, character, or scene you are most proud of?

The scenes between David and his friend, Ian, were a challenge because I was writing dialogue between two men whose private conversations are not witnessed by others who could help things along. I liked the challenge of creating Ian with a minimal of details and yet conveying his personality and humor and love for David. What was it like for David to have only one male friend who understood his pain and loss—and let him talk about it?

Polyamory and *The Half Life of Everything*

The Half-Life of Everything is a novel that delves into the realities and complications of “till death do us part.” It is a novel that asks: What happens between the blurred lines of sickness and health? What would you do to ensure happiness for the person you care most about?

In a new age of polyamory and queer relationships, this book lets us question what we know about ourselves and our limitations on monogamous love.

After main character David’s wife gets Alzheimer’s, he falls in love with someone else, only to find that his wife soon comes out of the disease with help of a miracle drug. David’s situation poses the question: Can you love two people at once? *Half-Life* brings into question what it means to fulfill the role of a spouse, friend, child, or parent, as well as what it means to break convention.

The reasons one might have for becoming polyamorous are endless. Maybe one person in the relationship is asexual but doesn’t want to inhibit their partner from having a fulfilling sex life. Maybe both people aren’t ready to give up a “free love” life-style but are still committed to their partner. Or maybe both partners found someone else that they’re both in love with and decide to expand their relationship to include this third person. All such situations involve full consent and extensive communication between all parties.

The Half-Life of Everything explores what a polyamorous relationship could look like when it’s not exactly what the parties are expecting or setting out to achieve.

AUTHOR TACKLES POLYAMORY–RELATED QUESTIONS

Did you have the rising trend of polyamory in mind when you created this novel?

It was quite a surprise to me that these three people came upon the idea.

They seem to have pulled it off. What do you think contributed to the characters being able to communicate so well with each other?

Well, they're all high functioning people. However, I did enjoy David's continual awareness of how bad he is at predicting what his wife will say and do. I also like having him realize that he can be self-centered and isn't always the best listener. It was satisfying to have him decide that he wants to be a better listener—and not just better “for a man”.

So many people are afraid to be honest with their partners about what they want, for fear of creating tension. How is it that your characters came to a place where they could voice their desires so comfortably?

I don't think they speak from a comfortable state of mind at all. Each only speaks about difficult topics out of misery. David, in particular, dreads every difficult conversation. But once they begin to discuss an issue, they are people who are capable of putting a sentence together and of thinking about what others feel and need.

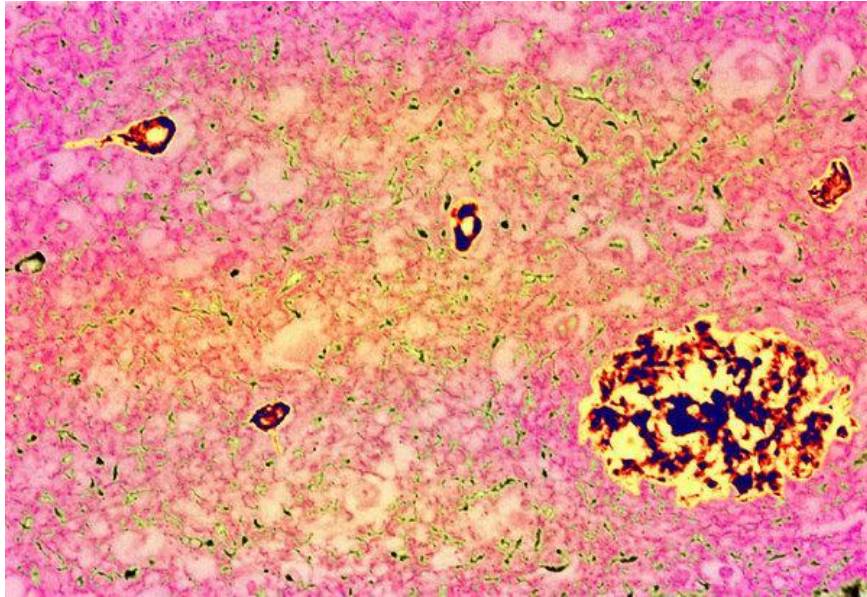
What do you think it must have been like to be a child whose parents are in such a strange situation? So often, children are more liberal than their parents, yet this seems to be the opposite situation.

The novel lets the adult sons, Dylan and Jack, consider and complain about the choices their parents make. We tend to be more liberal and forgiving of our choices than the choices our parents make. Parents are supposed to be predictable and unremarkable!

If the characters in *Half Life* had the vocabulary surrounding alternative relationships, do you think they would have done anything differently?

I see these characters as three individuals trying not to be miserable or to cause others misery. No polemic here. They matured in the early days of the sexual revolution and were content with the freedoms this cultural tsunami brought. Choosing to push boundaries further is an accident of circumstances, and they are certainly grateful for the freedom not to hide or lie.

New Alzheimer's Drug Shows Big Promise in Early Trial Results



The new drug slowed cognitive decline and reduced amyloid plaques, shown lower right in a colored light micrograph of an Alzheimer's patient.

Credit Simon Fraser/Science Source

By Pam Belluck
The New York Times
July 25, 2018

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/25/health/alzheimers-dementia-drug-treatment.html?emc=edit_th_180726&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=534936010726

The long, discouraging quest for a medication that works to treat Alzheimer's reached a potentially promising milestone on Wednesday. For the first time in a large clinical trial, a drug was able to both reduce the plaques in the brains of patients and slow the progression of dementia.

More extensive trials will be needed to know if the new drug is truly effective, but if the results, presented Wednesday at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference in Chicago, are borne out, the drug may be the first to successfully attack both the brain changes and the symptoms of Alzheimer's.

"This trial shows you can both clear plaque and change cognition," said Dr. Reisa Sperling, director of the Center for Alzheimer Research and Treatment at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, who was not involved in the study. "I don't know that we've hit a home run yet. It's important not to over-conclude on the data. But as a proof of concept, I feel like this is very encouraging."

Aside from a couple of medications that can slow memory decline for a few months, there is no effective treatment for Alzheimer's, which affects about 44 million people worldwide, including 5.5 million Americans. It is estimated that those numbers will triple by 2050.

The trial involved 856 patients from the United States, Europe and Japan with early symptoms of cognitive decline. They were diagnosed with either mild cognitive impairment or mild Alzheimer's dementia, and all had significant accumulations of the amyloid protein that clumps into plaques in people with the disease, said Dr. Lynn Kramer, chief medical officer of Eisai, a Japan-based company that developed the drug, known as BAN2401, along with Biogen, based in Cambridge, Mass.

Many other drugs have managed to reduce amyloid levels but they did not ease memory decline or other cognitive difficulties. In the data presented Wednesday, the highest of the five doses of the new drug — an injection every two weeks of 10 milligrams per kilogram of a patient's weight — both reduced amyloid levels and slowed cognitive decline when compared to patients who received placebo.

Of the 161 patients in the group taking the highest dose, 81 percent showed such significant drops in amyloid levels that they “converted from amyloid positive to amyloid negative,” Dr. Kramer said in an interview, meaning that the patients' amyloid levels dropped from being considered high enough to correlate to dementia to a level below that dementia threshold.

And on a battery of cognitive and functional tests measuring memory and skills like planning and reasoning, the performance of the high-dose group declined at a rate that was 30 percent slower than the rate of decline in the placebo group.

Dr. Sperling, who briefly advised Eisai last year on a different drug, called the reductions in amyloid “dramatic,” but said the cognitive results were less momentous. Still, she said, “If you could really slow decline by 30 percent for people who are still normal or very mildly impaired,

Dr. Samuel Gandy, associate director of the Mount Sinai Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, said that for the drug to really be effective, it would have to allow patients to function longer independently without needing caregivers to help them with basic daily activities. That kind of practical application was not reflected in the data presented Wednesday.

“I wouldn't say this is a quantum leap,” he said. “It is a convincing moving of the needle. But it's not clear that the needle has moved far enough to make a difference in people's lives.”

Dr. Kramer said the results were statistically significant 18 months after patients began taking the drug, but improvement began to be noticed after about six months. The 253 patients in the group receiving the second-highest dose also had amyloid and cognitive results that followed a similar trend.

In December 2017, the companies reported that a statistical analysis of the trial at the 12-month mark projected that the drug would not result in a statistically significant slowing of dementia. That meant that the trial did not meet its primary benchmark, which caused some experts and

investors to voice skepticism about the drug. The 18-month results allayed some of that skepticism, although the Alzheimer's Association issued a statement expressing caution and saying the results were "not large enough to definitely demonstrate cognitive efficacy."

The results came from a Phase 2 trial, which measures both the safety and the efficacy of a drug, but is typically considered an intermediate step to larger and more extensive Phase 3 trials. Other drugs have shown promise in Phase 2, only to disappoint in Phase 3.

In this trial, patients were randomized into six groups, with 247 patients receiving placebo injections while the other five groups received varying doses of the drug.

One unusual aspect of the trial raised questions for some experts. Eisai and Biogen used a cognitive assessment they devised. Called the Alzheimer's Disease Composite Score (Adcoms), it draws on elements from three other, more established cognitive tests.

Dr. Kramer said Adcoms was developed to compile the measures from those three tests that were sensitive enough to measure change at such an early stage of dementia. The data presented on Wednesday indicated that the patients also showed positive results on two of the three established tests, when those were looked at separately.

Some potential Alzheimer's treatments have resulted in serious side effects that may cause dangerous swelling or bleeding in the brain. Fewer than 10 percent of the patients taking the new drug experienced such effects, the companies reported, making it relatively safe.

The drug works by attacking the stringy amyloid tendrils that form before they begin sticking together into plaques. The results of the trial add evidence to the idea that treatment for Alzheimer's is most likely to succeed if it starts early in the disease process, because the brain begins to deteriorate years or even decades before full-blown dementia occurs. Some other drugs have failed because they were tried on patients with more advanced Alzheimer's; others attacked the amyloid at later points in its progression.

Even if study results continue to be positive, making the drug widely available to patients could take years. Dr. Kramer and Ivan Cheung, the chairman and chief executive of Eisai, said that the companies recently submitted a request to meet with the Food and Drug Administration to learn what steps they need to get the drug approved.

"It's a bit premature to talk about at this point, but our goal is to bring BAN2401 to patients and families as soon as possible," Mr. Cheung said.

The F.D.A. typically requires Phase 3 clinical trial data to demonstrate safety and effectiveness. However, the agency does have processes for expediting the review of drugs, said a spokeswoman, who declined to comment on this drug or on conditions that would be taken into consideration for an Alzheimer's drug.

Eisai is the maker of Aricept, which is one of the few drugs that can help slow early memory decline, but which is effective for only about six to nine months. Biogen is the maker of another

Alzheimer's treatment, aducanumab, that has shown early promise in a small Phase 1 trial in both reducing amyloid and slowing cognitive decline. Many in the Alzheimer's field are intently anticipating the outcome of two large clinical trials of aducanumab, expected to be able to report results in 2020.

Dr. Gandy said the BAN2401 results were encouraging for the prospects of aducanumab because it suggests that there are at least two compounds that may be able to attack both amyloid buildup and cognitive decline.

In early July, when the companies announced they would soon present positive results from the BAN2401 trial, the stock prices of both companies rose by about 20 percent. They have since stayed roughly at that level.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The short fiction of Deborah Carol Gang has been published in *Literarymama Bluestem Journal* and *The Driftless Review*.



Her poetry has appeared in *JJournal/CUNY*, *New Verse News*, *The Michigan Poet*, *Literarymama*, *Arsenic Lobster*, and *The Liberal Media Made Me Do It*.

Her research as a clinical psychologist has been published in *Education and Treatment of Children*.

Originally from Washington, D.C., she moved to St. Paul to attend Macalester College and then to graduate school in Kalamazoo, Michigan (Western Michigan University), where she remained for her work as a psychotherapist and because of her love of the Great Lake one hour to the West.

Still living in Kalamazoo, she has a Midwestern accent and now writes fulltime.