

Remember those who cannot Remember

Dear Friends Its great honour to present you my views with regards to Alzheimer's in India. On this World Alzheimer's Day' 2007, I take this opportunity to Congratulate Mr. P. Vyasamoorthy and all the members of 'Society for Serving Seniors' for arranging the Awareness Programme for AD.

Alzheimer's & Related Disorders Society of India (ARDSI) is celebrating "National Dementia Awareness Week" from 16th Sep to 22nd Sep 2007, and organisations and like-minded people like you are arranging and participating in such Programme to support the cause of Dementia in India. It will go long way to support the cause of the patients and the caregivers.

I am not a Doctor, Psychologist, nor Social worker by profession but have Passion to work for the Elderly and for the cause Alzheimer's. I got interested with the cause because of my work in Dignity Foundation. Also I with my Colleague Ms. Hendi Lingiah was instrumental in starting India's first 24 x 7 Dementia Care Center, near Mumbai. Working with the patients, care givers and through net browsing I gained knowledge about Dementia, which I would like to share with the society.

Dementia is a brain disorder that seriously affects a person's ability to carry out daily activities. The most common form of dementia among older people is Alzheimer's disease, which initially involves the parts of the brain that control thought, memory and language.

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a silent killer of brain and lives of world's elderly people. It is the fourth leading cause of death among the older adults in the developed world. Named after Alois Alzheimer, the German physician who identified it in 1907, it remains elusive as to its cause and is resistive to treatment. It starts as a robber of memory and slowly erodes the intellectual and functional abilities leaving the patients bed-ridden and ultimately leads to death, mostly by pneumonia (infection of the lungs). The course the disease takes and how fast changes occur vary from person to person. On average, patients live from eight to 10 years after they are diagnosed, though some people may live with the disease for as many as 20 years. Alzheimer's Disease is not senility, and it is not a normal part of the aging process. It is a disease. It can strike anyone. It may be diagnosed only by a physician and only after a thorough physical, psychological, and neurological evaluation.

In India, by 2005 approximately 3 to 4 million were afflicted by dementia. As per study about 4 per cent of the population over 65 are afflicted with dementia, it will mean that in 2010, we will have around 10 million people with Alzheimer's disease.

No treatment can stop Alzheimer's disease. However, for some people in the early and middle stages of the disease, the drugs terrine (Cognacs), donepezil (Precept), rivastigmine (Exeo), or glutamine (previously known as Romany) may help prevent some symptoms from becoming worse for a limited time.

Most often spouses and other family members provide the day-to-day care for people with Alzheimer's disease. As the disease gets worse, people often need more and more care. This can be hard for caregivers and can affect their physical and mental health, family life, job and finances.

As my Ex colleague Ms Hendi Lingiah, clinical psychologist, France says "It would be a hard task, knowing for example the number of the Dementia population in India. Following a plan in the public health policy becomes a necessity: Recognition of the early symptoms of dementia, Different models of interventions, Research on disease, Drug and Non-drug therapies, Infrastructures- training of professional and home caregivers."

"*This challenge* of public health is happening in developing countries hardly, do we let it crushing us or do we start working together. Research on Alzheimer's disease in India is still in the initial stages. Medication is expensive. Among the family members care for Alzheimer's patients, with the best of intentions, is low priority. Professional support systems are non-existent. Against this background general physicians and neurologists try their best to makes things better for AD patients. We do not have enough day care centers or assisted living communes as in the West. Are there any aids or gadgets that make life a little better for AD persons?"

Due to lack of awareness of AD most patients/family members tend to ignore the symptoms of the disease as normal part of aging process. Clinical help is sought only after a drastic deterioration of patient's health.

Creating mass awareness about this tragic condition can help detect Alzheimer's at an early stage and create avenues for appropriate support and care to patients.

What is needed is counseling and support services to help maintain the capacity of the caregivers. The training of volunteers and informal caregivers can be of immense help in supporting family and caregivers. Also all old age homes and hospitals should have AD wards.

So if you know any one suffering from Alzheimer's or Dementia, take him to the Doctor for diagnosis or to the Organisation who offers psycho - social care facilities.

I know there are not enough specialists entirely devoted to this field or their action is limited due to lack of fund and good will. But presently in India, Ageing and Senior Care has become an important issue and the government has started to react by integrating it in its policy of old people. But Let's not only depend on the Ministry and we all should come together and make a joint effort in our own ways to make life of seniors comfortable and offer support and care to people suffering from Alzheimer's and their care givers. *Please find* in next page warning signs of Alzheimer's, for early detection.

Together we all can do a lot for Alzheimer's people, so join the movement

10 warning signs of Alzheimer's:

- 1. Memory loss.** Forgetting recently learned information is one of the most common early signs of dementia. A person begins to forget more often and is unable to recall the information later.
- 2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks.** People with dementia often find it hard to plan or complete everyday tasks. Individuals may lose track of the steps involved in preparing a meal, placing a telephone call or playing a game.
- 3. Problems with language.** People with Alzheimer's disease often forget simple words or substitute unusual words, making their speech or writing hard to understand. They may be unable to find the toothbrush, for example, and instead ask for "that thing for my mouth."
- 4. Disorientation to time and place.** People with Alzheimer's disease can become lost in their own neighborhood, forget where they are and how they got there, and not know how to get back home.
- 5. Poor or decreased judgment.** Those with Alzheimer's may dress inappropriately, wearing several layers on a warm day or little clothing in the cold. They may show poor judgment, like giving away large sums of money to telemarketers.
- 6. Problems with abstract thinking.** Someone with Alzheimer's disease may have unusual difficulty performing complex mental tasks, like forgetting what numbers are for and how they should be used.
- 7. Misplacing things.** A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places: an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl.
- 8. Changes in mood or behavior.** Someone with Alzheimer's disease may show rapid mood swings – from calm to tears to anger – for no apparent reason.
- 9. Changes in personality.** The personalities of people with dementia can change dramatically. They may become extremely confused, suspicious, fearful or dependent on a family member.
- 10. Loss of initiative.** A person with Alzheimer's disease may become very passive, sitting in front of the TV for hours, sleeping more than usual or not wanting to do usual activities.

If you recognize any warning signs in yourself or a loved one, then consult a doctor. Early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or other disorders causing dementia is an important step to getting appropriate treatment, care and support services.

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