

early detection of alzheimer's disease: important information for physicians

Current studies estimate that between 2000 and 2005, less than 35 percent of people living with Alzheimer's or related dementias actually had a diagnosis of the condition in their medical record (Boise et al., 2004; Boustani et al., 2005; Ganguli et al., 2004; Valcour et al. 2000). Research findings show that diverse audiences, particularly African-Americans and Hispanics, could be affected by Alzheimer's disease at disproportionate rates.

A complete diagnostic workup should be considered when informal cognitive tests suggest further evaluation is needed or when a patient or family member expresses a persistent suspicion that something may be wrong.

It is important for a physician to determine the cause of memory loss or other symptoms. Some dementia-like symptoms can be reversed if they are caused by treatable conditions, such as depression, drug interaction, thyroid problems, excess use of alcohol or certain vitamin deficiencies.

Timely detection of memory loss or cognitive impairment offers many benefits for people with dementia, their families and physicians.

BENEFITS FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA AND THEIR FAMILIES

- People in the early stages of the disease will be better able to report symptoms and concerns and understand their own disease process
- Opportunities to find community resources, such as the Alzheimer's Association, that may maximize opportunities for independence
- More time to plan for the future
- Increased ability to choose their care team
- Best opportunity to benefit from available treatments
- Ability to participate in clinical studies
- Gives families the opportunity to learn about Alzheimer's and plan for their future together, which may result in reduced stress and feelings of burden

BENEFITS FOR PHYSICIANS

- Easier identification of treatable or reversible disorders that may cause further medical or psychosocial complication
- Early diagnosis and intervention that allows for prescribing medications may improve symptoms
- Ability to more effectively manage complications from co-existing medical conditions
- Ability to make referrals to available clinical studies in your area
- Better understanding of patient's abilities to manage their own care, including medications
- Reduction in possible errors or poor compliance when gauging self-care abilities of the person
- Respect for a patient's right for self-determination and ability to make their own healthcare decisions whenever possible
- Time to address safety concerns before accidents or emergencies occur

early detection of alzheimer's disease: important information for physicians

Five studies confirm that patients prefer to know their diagnosis as soon as possible (Derksen et al, 2006; Elson et al, 2006; Pratt et al, 2003; Preston et al, 2007; Robinson et al, 2005). *Voices of Alzheimer's Disease: A summary report on the nationwide town hall meetings for people with early-stage dementia*, based on discussions with more than 300 people with dementia, also confirms this perspective.

The Alzheimer's Association's *Know the 10 Signs: Early Detection Matters* campaign emphasizes the importance of early detection and encourages people to speak to their doctor if they are seeing any signs in themselves or in a loved one. Seeking help from a physician is the first step to getting a proper diagnosis.

The Alzheimer's Association's 10 Warning Signs are a public awareness tool and were developed in collaboration with dementia experts. The Warning Signs translate the diagnostic criteria for Alzheimer's disease into words that patients and families can understand.

TO GET INVOLVED IN THE KNOW THE 10 SIGNS CAMPAIGN YOU CAN:

- Learn the 10 Warning Signs and talk to your patients about what they mean.
- Post the 10 Warning Signs poster throughout your office (e.g. waiting rooms, reception counter, etc.) or link to www.alz.org/10signs on your practice Web site.
- Discuss the opportunities for clinical studies with your patients.
- Commit to the *Principles of a Dignified Diagnosis*, a statement written by people living with the disease on how to improve the diagnostic experience.
- Refer patients to Alzheimer's Association or other community resources for ongoing education and support.
- Share information with practice partners or peers.
- Encourage your organization to join the Alzheimer's Early Detection Alliance (www.alz.org/AEDA).
- Connect with your local chapter for materials and more information by calling 1.800.272.3900 or visiting www.alz.org.

For more information on the 10 Warning Signs and importance of early detection of Alzheimer's, visit the Alzheimer's Association at www.alz.org/10signs.

CLINICAL STUDIES INITIATIVE: YOUR ROLE IN FINDING A CURE

Over the last 15 years, scientists have made enormous strides in understanding how Alzheimer's disease affects the brain. Many of these recent insights point toward promising new strategies for the treatment, prevention, and diagnosis of this devastating illness. In fact a record number of promising experimental medications are in the final stages of clinical research and over 100 studies are seeking to recruit participants. Unfortunately, however, there is a critical shortage of volunteers.

You are an important link between patients, their families and the investigators in your community who are actively seeking volunteers.

For most patient volunteers, the single biggest factor in deciding whether to join a clinical study is the dialogue that takes place with members of their healthcare team. As a trusted resource, you can make a difference by providing up-to-date information about clinical studies and offering guidance on whether volunteering is an appropriate option.

For general information about clinical research and a full listing of studies that are currently recruiting in your area, you or your patients can visit us online or call the Association's toll-free Clinical Studies Hotline at:

1.800.982.8299 or
www.alz.org/clinicalstudies