What is Lewy Body Dementia?

LBD is not a rare disease. It affects an estimated 1.3 million individuals and their families in the United States. Because LBD symptoms can closely resemble other more commonly known diseases like Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s, it is currently widely underdiagnosed. Many doctors or other medical professionals still are not familiar with LBD.

LBD is an umbrella term for two related diagnoses. LBD refers to both Parkinson’s disease dementia and dementia with Lewy bodies. The earliest symptoms of these two diseases differ, but reflect the same underlying biological changes in the brain. Over time, people with both diagnoses will develop very similar cognitive, physical, sleep, and behavioral symptoms.

While it may take more than a year or two for enough symptoms to develop for a doctor to diagnose LBD, it is critical to pursue a formal diagnosis. Early diagnosis allows for important early treatment that may extend quality of life and independence.

LBD is a multisystem disease and typically requires a comprehensive treatment approach. This approach involves a team of physicians from different specialties who collaborate to provide optimum treatment of each symptom without worsening other LBD symptoms. Many people with LBD enjoy significant improvement of their symptoms with a comprehensive approach to treatment, and some can have remarkably little change from year to year.

Some people with LBD are extremely sensitive or may react negatively to certain medications used to treat Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s in addition to certain over-the-counter medications.
Melanie M. Brandabur
M.D., MDS

Clinical Director

Melanie Brandabur, M.D. received her BA degree from the University of Illinois in Urbana and her MD degree from Rush Medical College in Chicago. She completed her neurology residency at Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke’s Medical Center in Chicago.

While there, she completed a Fellowship in Movement Disorders and Pharmacology and post-doctoral basic sciences Fellowship in Neurodegenerative Diseases to examine changes in nitric oxide synthase in the brains of patients with Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s diseases. She served as the medical director of the National Parkinson Foundation Center of Excellence Movement Disorders Center, first at the University of Illinois and then at Alexian Neurosciences Institute.

In July of 2006, she joined the faculty at The Parkinson’s Institute in Sunnyvale, California as the director of the outpatient clinic for Parkinson’s disease and other movement disorders. Dr Brandabur’s interests include multidisciplinary care, patient education, underserved populations and caregiver support. She lectures frequently on these and other aspects of PD including complementary therapies, cognitive issues and non-motor symptoms.

Dr. Brandabur has over 16 years of experience caring for patients with PD and related disorders. Her philosophy of patient care arises from her strong beliefs in patient education and a multidisciplinary approach to PD treatment.

Teresa Tempkin
RNC, MSN, ANP

Nurse Practitioner
Movement Disorder Clinics
Department of Neurology
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Ms. Tempkin is an Adult Nurse Practitioner working in the Parkinson’s and Huntington’s Disease clinics at the University of California Davis Medical Center with Vicki Wheelock, MD. She has been an advanced practice nurse for over 28 years.

She currently spends half her time seeing patients in clinic and the other half doing research. Her primary focus is to help families cope with the debilitating effects of progressive neurological diseases.

John Young
President
Lewy Body Dementia Association

John Young has served on LBDA’s board since the day after its incorporation in 2003 and serves as President through 2009. John’s 20+ career in law enforcement included service for the UN on the International Police Task Force in Bosnia, where he also served as an Election Officer in Foca and as a Chief Human Rights Investigator in Sarajevo. John brings prior board service experience as well, having served on the boards of a local police association and hockey organization. He took an early retirement to care for his spouse, Janet, who passed away from Lewy body dementia in 2006. John resides in Lake Tahoe, CA.