

Dementia: cases 'likely to double in next 20 years'



Kym Klass, Montgomery Advertiser

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PRATTVILLE – A goal in caring for patients with dementia is doing so while helping them maintain their dignity and the right level of independence they've been able to maintain.

Because over time, they will lose all of that as their disease progresses.

Alabama's Dementia Care Conference: Strategies, Approaches and Practical Solutions, a two-day conference that on Tuesday brought in keynote speaker Peter Rabins — director of the division of geriatric psychiatry, school of medicine, at Johns Hopkins University — focuses on improving the delivery of needed services to those who suffer from dementia.

The conference is meant to educate professionals and caregivers about an increasingly large challenge that the state of Alabama has in terms of dementia and Alzheimer's. Sponsored by the Alabama Department of Senior Services, the conference continues Wednesday with a focus on "Living with Dementia: Professional and Personal Perspectives on Coping with a New Reality."

Guest speakers Thursday are Arlene Morris, professor of nursing, Auburn Montgomery; Lexie Turnipseed, adjunct professor of counseling psychology, South University; and Carrie Richardson, a 34-year-old single mother of three who is living with early onset familial Alzheimer's.

Dementia, Rabins said, is an umbrella term that refers to any disease that starts in adulthood and impairs two or more aspects of thinking. People with dementia are fully awake and alert, he added, although the thinking impairments have affected their daily functioning in some way. There are at least 80 diseases that can cause dementia, including Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and lupus.

The most common disease, he said, is Alzheimer's.

"We really learned a lot in the past 30 years in how to care for people with dementia and Alzheimer's," Rabins said Tuesday. "The challenge now is getting that information to family members who take care of patients at home, and professionals who work in all kinds of long term care settings. Dementia is a huge public health issue. The number of people with dementia is likely to double in the next 20 years because the population is aging."

There are estimates that more than 5 million people suffer from dementia in the U.S. and it's the sixth-leading cause of death. In Alabama, there are about 86,000 people age 65 and older who are living with Alzheimer's. By the year 2025, that number is expected to increase to 110,000 people.

Nationally, it's projected that about 16 million people will have the disease in 2050.

Today, every 67 seconds, a dementia case is found. It is estimated by mid-century that that will happen every 33 seconds because of the aging population.

Between 60 percent and 90 percent of people with dementia also have behavioral or psychiatric problems that come from the disease. And about 98 percent of people "want to live at home with dementia," Rabins said, "Not everybody can."

"We need a whole gamut of approaches. We need nursing home beds, more assisted living beds, day cares, and we need to help families. The majority of people live at home — more than two-thirds of people living with dementia live with their families. We have to figure out better ways to help those families do what everyone wants to do."

The goal in Alzheimer's disease treatment, he said, is rehabilitation.

"What do rehabilitation specialists do?," Rabins asked. "They figure out what can the person no longer do, and then we give them an aid. If someone needs a cane because they've had a stroke and they are weak on one side, we give them a cane. If they need a walker to be steady, we give them a walker."

"But equally important, they also figure out what can the person still do. And our goal here is to maximize the person's functioning independence."

Dementia is not just a social service issue, or a mental health one, or a senior issue or a fraud issue. It is all of those, and Rabin said getting people together will make a difference.

"It's a very important social issue, and one that is growing," said Nancy Buckner, commissioner, Alabama Department of Human Resources, and who

attended Tuesday's conference. "And I think it is important that we all work together. The (DHR) is responsible for the investigation of abuse and neglect and exploitation with elderly and disabled persons who are unable to protect themselves. A lot of the reports that we get in that division involve persons that have dementia, that are being taken advantage of financially, or there could be abuse, too, or neglect."

She said roughly 70 percent of the number of reports the DHR receives involve a person having dementia.

"If we live long enough, we're all going to be there one day," Buckner said. "And I think it's incumbent upon our society to take care of our seniors."

If you go ...

WHAT: Alabama Dementia Care Conference

WHEN: 8:30-11:45 a.m. today

WHERE: The Legends Marriott Hotel and Conference Center, Prattville

Common causes of dementia

Alzheimer's disease: 66 percent

Vascular dementia: 15 percent to 20 percent

Dementia with Lewy bodies: 8 percent to 15 percent

Fronto-temporal dementia: 5 percent

4 As of Alzheimer's Disease

Amnesia: memory

Aphasia: language

Apraxia: doing

Agnosia: recognition/perception

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healthafter50.com

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