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SPECIAL REPORT HEALTH SERIES

What Is Alzheimer's Disease?

Alzheimer's disease (pronounced Alz-hi-merz) is a progressive, degenerative disease that attacks the brain and results in impaired memory, thinking and behavior. It affects an estimated 4 million American adults.

When it was first diagnosed by German physician Alois Alzheimer in 1907, Alzheimer's disease was considered a rare disorder.

Today, it is recognized as the most common cause of dementia. Alzheimer's disease is distinguished from other forms of dementia by characteristic changes in the brain that are visible only upon microscopic examination.

Another characteristic of Alzheimer's disease is the reduced production of certain brain chemicals, especially acetylcholine, but also includes norepinephrine, serotonin and soma-tostatin. These chemicals are necessary for normal communication between nerve cells.

Alzheimer's is a devastating disease that affects 5% of people at age 65 and nearly 50% of those 85 and older. Fortunately, in recent years there has been an explosion of research into the causes and treatment options for Alzheimer's. Now new medications can be used for Alzheimer's patients and prolong an Alzheimer's patients quality of life. However, given all of the challenges facing caregivers of Alzheimer's patients, a simple organized method is needed to track all of the various symptoms and responses to treatment in order to maximize their quality of life.

In addition to the suffering of the patient, the burden on families of Alzheimer's patients is an enormous one personally, medically, and financially. Fortunately, at Angel's Loving Care, our Professional CareGivers® can help families cope with these additional challenges.

What are some of the warning signs of Alzheimer's?

- ❖ Memory loss that affects job skills
- ❖ Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- ❖ Problems with language
- ❖ Disorientation to time and place
- ❖ Poor or decreased judgment
- ❖ Problems with abstract thinking
- ❖ Misplacing things
- ❖ Changes of mood or behavior
- ❖ Changes in personality
- ❖ Loss of initiative

These are very broad warning signs that require significantly more in depth evaluation.

It is a myth that aging and psychiatric problems go hand in hand and it is also a myth that it is not worth conducting accurate diagnostics, because 'nothing can be done about it anyway' - some diagnoses are wrong, some diseases are treatable. If the situation is not satisfactory, relatives should seek expert consultation e.g in an Alzheimer advice center, find out addresses of experts and obtain get information about legal/financial support, etc.