

# The Times

Vol. II, No. 2

Mercy Hospital and Medical Center

Winter 1991

## MERCY OPENS ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE CENTER

**I** imagine forgetting how to tie your shoes or how to find the bathroom in your own house. Sounds incredible, but victims of Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers face these dilemmas daily. Affecting one out of every ten people over the age of 65, Alzheimer's disease has no known cause.

Its symptoms can include: memory loss, a personality change, problems with understanding what people say and coordination; its debilitating effects can progress to the point where a patient can no longer care for him/herself.

Alzheimer's patients' brains are characterized by "plaques and tangles" that cause dementia or a decline in cognitive function. Tangles are neurons that die when caught in the plaques or protein deposits. The more plaques and tangles, the more pronounced the disease.

CAT scans and MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) studies can help detect the degeneration of the brain. Audrius Plioplys, M.D., neurologist and Director of Alzheimer's Disease Center explains, "The diagnosis can be extremely tricky. Other conditions such as vitamin deficiency, thyroid deficiency, depressions and general illness may produce the

same symptoms, but require completely different treatments. Alzheimer's can be a really incapacitating disease and its rate of progression is extremely variable."

Mercy's new center offers patients and caregivers a comprehensive program, including: diagnosis, short and long term therapies, support and the opportunity to participate (if appropriate) in small scale studies with new medications.

Dr. Plioplys will start testing a new medication this winter. The drug inhibits the breakdown of acetylcholine—an important substance related to the memory process. Dr. Plioplys also oversees a team of researchers who are working to locate disease markers and to define the cause. He is "very optimistic that we will be able to intervene in the near future."

Mercy realizes that Alzheimer's affects more than the patient—it is a great burden on their caregivers—and has developed a support system to aid them. "Trying to understand dementia is very difficult and frustrating," says Shirley LoBianco, Eldercare Advisor/Information and Referral Coordinator. "I encourage caregivers to get respite for themselves. It can open doors to unknown resources and allows caregivers to see that they are not

alone in their situation."

A trust forms within the support group. Nothing leaves the room and members share experiences and suggestions. Mercy's meetings are held at Mercy Medical on Pulaski (5635 South Pulaski, Chicago) the first Wednesday of the month from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. If you would like more information about the group, please call Shirley LoBianco at (312) 567-5678.

Mercy also offers respite care services at Mercy Health Care and Rehabilitation Center (19000 South Halsted, Homewood). It is impossible for caregivers to give of themselves 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Mercy gives caregivers a chance to take a break, comfortable with the knowledge that their loved one is being cared for in a pleasant environment by skilled professionals.

Home Health Care Services are available to help ease the burden of caring for someone who is incapacitated. If you would like a professional or homemaker/companion (depending on your needs) to help you with daily activities, please call Shirley LoBianco at (312) 567-5678.

To schedule an appointment for the Alzheimer's Disease Center, please call Angela Britton, Coordinator at (312) 567-7900. Dr. Plioplys will see patients at The Doctors Office Center in Mercy Hospital and Medical Center. □

# Mercy Offers Families Hope

Alzheimer's disease can be cruel. It frustrates and embarrasses victims who can no longer remember how to do simple things such as tying one's shoes or finding the bathroom in their own house, and can be a great burden on family members and caregivers who must deal with this regression and loss of capabilities.

Affecting one out of every ten people over the age of 65, Alzheimer's disease has no known cause. Its symptoms may include: memory loss, a personality change, problems with understanding what people say and loss of coordination skills; and its debilitating effects can progress to the point where the victim may no longer care for him/herself.

## Early Detection Important

While there is no known cure for Alzheimer's disease, its progress can be stopped or slowed by some treatment methods. Patients' brains are characterized "plaques (protein deposits) and tangles (dead neurons caught in the plaques)" which cause dementia or a decline in functioning.

CT scans and MRI studies can help detect this degeneration of the brain. Audrius Plioplys, M.D., neurologist and Director of Alzheimer's Disease Center explains, "The diagnosis can be extremely tricky. Other conditions such as vitamin deficiency, thyroid deficiency, depressions and general illness - may produce the same symptoms, but require completely different treatments. Alzheimer's can be a really incapacitating disease and its rate of progression is extremely variable."

Mercy has developed an Alzheimer's Disease Center to offer patients and their families a comprehensive program, including: short and long-term therapies, support and the opportunity to participate (when appropriate) in small scale clinical studies with new medications. Dr. Pliopiys oversees a team of researchers who are working to locate disease markers and to define the cause. He is "very optimistic that we will be able to intervene in the near future."

## Relieving the Burden

Families and caregivers face

particularly difficult burdens, they have seen a loved one change and have had to assume responsibilities which can be very frustrating at times. Understanding this, Mercy offers an Alzheimer's disease support group to aid them. "Trying to understand dementia is very difficult and frustrating," says Shirley LoBianco, Eldercare Advisor/Information and Referral Coordinator. "I encourage caregivers to get respite for themselves. It can open doors to unknown resources and allows caregivers to see that they are not alone in their situation." Members meet monthly at Mercy Medical on Pulaski (first Wednesday of the month from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.) and share experiences and helpful suggestions.

 **MERCY**  
**The Alzheimer's Disease Center**

Mercy Hospital and Medical Center  
Stevenson Expressway at King Drive  
Chicago, Illinois 60616-2477  
312-567-7900

