

AHWATUKEE FOOTHILLS NEWS

Dementia Care Can Drive People Broke



January 15, 2020 by Dr. Harold Wong

In an October, 2019 opinion piece in the Orlando Sentinel, four MDs and former U.S. Surgeon Generals (Richard Carmona, Joycelyn Elders, Antonia Novello, and David Satcher) called dementia the “top public health crisis” in an effort to call attention to the rapid rise of the disease. “Its scale is unprecedented, and its numbers, already tragic, are growing rapidly.”

According to the Lancet Commission, around 50 million people worldwide have dementia, and that number is predicted to triple by 2050. “For those over the age of 65, the number living with the disease doubles every five years”, wrote the surgeon generals in the op-ed. “Five years is also how long we have before half of all Baby Boomers are over the age of 65 – paving the way for 14 million people living with dementia by 2050.

What is dementia?

This is an umbrella term that covers several medical conditions, including Alzheimer’s disease. It is marked by a progressive cognitive decline which includes memory loss and inability to think. Patients who have dementia miss appointments and phone calls. They may hear you and nod, but can’t remember what was said. In advanced cases, they won’t be able to even recognize their spouse, kids, friends and others close to them. Dementia is caused by brain cells that are sick and dying. There may be a build-up of toxic proteins that the body can’t properly dispose of.

According to the National Institute on Aging, “many neurons stop functioning, lose connections with other neurons, and die”. With Alzheimer’s disease, the neurons that have connections in the parts of the brain involved with memory are typically destroyed first.

What can you do to reduce your risk of dementia?

The 4 surgeon generals stated that the latest research shows dementia “isn’t simply the inevitable result of statistical predetermination or old age, like gray hair or wrinkles.” According to the recent Lancet Commission report “around 35 percent of dementia is attributable to a combination of the following nine risk factors: education to a maximum age of 11-12 years, midlife hypertension, midlife obesity, hearing loss, late-life depression, diabetes, physical inactivity, smoking and social isolation.” Note that excessive alcohol intake can increase the risk. However, there is a lot unknown about dementia and a simple prescription is to: get regular exercise; have loving relationships with family and friends; eat a healthy diet such as the heart-healthy Mediterranean diet; and keep your brain active with games, hobbies and exercises.

Why Dementia can Cause You to Go Broke!

Almost all seniors want to stay in their home as long as possible. However, when they either don’t have a loyal caregiver or the burden is too

great, one moves to an assisted living facility, which can last for 2-3 years. According to the National Center for Assisted Living, 59% of all assisted living residents will eventually move to a skilled nursing facility, with an average stay of 835 days. When you combine all of this, it’s not unusual for the family to have to pay for 4-5 years of long-term care, which can cost over \$300,000. I’ve met families who had a relative with dementia stay in a nursing home for 10 years and the cost can double.

Most senior families do NOT have this much saved, in addition to the \$250,000 - \$300,000 estimated for an average retired couple to spend on other healthcare needs. With dementia, the mind can be gone but the body stays alive.

Free Seminar: “7 Critical Actions To Take In Case of Dementia” will be held 10 am -12 noon, Saturday January 18, 2020, at Hyatt Place, 3535 W. Chandler Blvd, Chandler, AZ 85226 by Chandler Fashion Center.

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Dr. Harold Wong earned his Ph.D. in Economics at the University of California/Berkeley and has appeared on over 400 TV/Radio programs.