-Brain— Diseases

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA AND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

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Lapses in memory may occur in the normal elderly person, but dementia is not an inevitable part of aging.

Popular movies like The Notebook, and famous personalities like former US President Ronald Reagan and country music superstar Glen Campbell have increased awareness of dementia and of Alzheimer's disease (AD), conditions that were relatively unfamiliar to most people until recently.

For those who have loved ones with these conditions, the tragedy is seeing them forget how to do the simplest activities, or worse, forget their own identities and those dearest to them.

Makati Medical Center takes you through the basics of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Contrary to frequent belief, dementia is not synonymous to Alzheimer's disease.

According to Dr. Darwin A. Dasig, chairperson of MakatiMed's Neurological Sciences Department, "dementia is an acquired condition causing intellectual decline in an awake person that is sustained and severe enough to cause impairment in occupational or social function."

There are many disorders that cause dementia. The most common cause is Alzheimer's disease. But there are other causes, which include vascular dementia, dementia with lewy bodies and frontotemporal dementia.

AD is believed to be due to the accumulation of an abnormal protein in the brain called beta amyloid. This brings about several other processes and mechanisms that result in progressive death and loss of brain cells. Because this starts at the area of the brain necessary for the consolidation of memory, the earliest symptom of AD is impairment of short-term memory. But with continuous loss of cells in other parts of the brain, patients eventually experience impairment in language, orientation with surroundings, problem solving and behavior.

"During the most advanced stage, they may be completely mute, unable to move and become bed-ridden," said Dr. Dasig.

AD is very prevalent and should be treated as a major public health issue.

"Early diagnosis is of utmost importance for health care to be initiated earlier,says Dr. Dasig. There are at present available effective medical and non-pharmacological treatment strategies to maintain and maximize existing functions and prevent further progression of impairment in persons with AD.‘‘

For information, call MakatiMed On-Call at 8888-999, email mmc@ makatimed.net.ph or visit www.makatimed.net.ph