

Dementia- A Health Problem among Elderly

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Health of elderly persons is always a great concern for everybody. With the advancement of age lot of physical, psychological, and social problems gradually cripples the quality of life of elderly persons. Forgetfulness or gradual loss of memory is one of them. Broadly loss of memory is called amnesia which may be anterograde or retrograde. Dementia is in fact a series of symptoms and more complicated medical problem of the elderly.

Dementia is a Latin word. It means demented or out of mind. It also means the loss of ability to think, remember or reason as well as behavioral abilities, to such an extent that it interferes with a person's daily life and activities¹. Dementia in the elderly is called senile dementia or senility. It is viewed as a normal and somewhat inevitable aspect of growing old. Dementia is one of the major causes of disability in later life².

In 1907, a specific organic dementia-ting process of early onset, called Alzheimer's disease was described³. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia and possibly contributes to 60-70% of cases⁴. Alzheimer's disease is the sixth leading cause of death in the United states and the fifth leading cause of death in Americans age 65 and above.

The UN population projection estimated that 35.6 million people worldwide were living with dementia in 2010. The highest number of people with dementia are living in Western Europe (7.0 million), closely followed by East Asia with 5.5 million⁵. With the increasing life expectancy, dementia is increasing at an alarming rate in Asia including Bangladesh.

All persons with dementia will not display all symptoms and deterioration of symptoms may

occur slowly or quickly. At early stage the person become forgetful, especially regarding things that just happened. The person may lose track of time and lost in familiar places. May have difficulty making decisions and handling personal finances and may have mood or behavioral changes including depression or anxiety.

As the disease progresses limitations become clearer and more restricting. The person become very forgetful, need help with care (toileting, washing, dressing), unable to live alone safely without considerable support.

In the late stage the person develop difficulty understanding what is happening around them. Also become unable to recognize relatives, friends, and familiar objects. Person also develops bladder and bowel incontinence. Behavioral changes may escalate and include aggression towards care, nonverbal agitation (kicking, hitting, screaming or moaning)⁶.

No treatments are currently available to cure or even alter the progressive course of dementia. Dementia strikes individuals with poorly controlled diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and heart diseases (vascular dementia).

However there is much that can be offered to support and improve the lives of people with dementia and the principal goals for care are:

- Early diagnosis.
- Detecting and treating behavioral and psychological symptoms
- Providing information and long term support to caregivers.

Considering importance of this health problem necessary step to be taken to create awareness among policymaker and local community. Private and government health authorities should come forward to address dementia as a public health problem in Bangladesh.

References:

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