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FREE EVALUATION, MEDICATION FOR ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

UT Southwestern seeks
patients for research studies

DALLAS -- Just because people are aging doesn't mean they should have memory problems affecting their daily lives, nor should they be confused often, forget to eat or experience irritable--even violent--spells. These behaviors are signs that something is wrong, says Doris Svetlik, senior research nurse in the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC) at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

The problem may or may not be Alzheimer's disease. Small strokes or certain medications can cause memory loss, confusion or other strange behavior. The person may be taking several medications and having a toxic reaction to the drugs. There could be a brain tumor. The person may have a thyroid disorder or be depressed. Or it could be Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease, which causes mental deterioration, effects changes in the brain and, eventually, most of the muscles in the body. It strikes 1 in 10 people over 65. The disease seems to run in families, so researchers believe there may be a genetic factor.

The only way to know whether Alzheimer's disease is causing the problem is medical evaluation, Svetlik says.

(More)

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Your family doctor or a doctor who specializes in aging patients, called a geriatric physician, is a good way to start, she suggests.

The ADRC at UT Southwestern evaluates people for Alzheimer's disease. Researchers also are testing new Alzheimer's medicines. These tests are called double-blind studies because some participants are given the drug being tested while others get placebos, which are harmless substitutes. Neither the volunteers nor the doctors and nurses know which patients are getting the medicine being tested and which, the placebos.

So far only one medication has shown signs of helping patients with Alzheimer's. And that medicine has helped relatively few. However, at least one medication that is currently being tested at UT Southwestern looks promising, according to preliminary research results.

The idea of taking experimental drugs may bother some people, Svetlik said. However, since Alzheimer's is a disease with no cure, new medications may offer at least some hope. And patients in the studies and their families can benefit from the advice, concern and understanding provided by the health care professionals in the ADRC.

To find out more about Alzheimer's disease studies in the Dallas area, call (214) 688-8699.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School, affiliated teaching hospitals and outpatient clinics.