



Health Awareness

New Information May Help Families of Loved Ones with Alzheimer's Disease

(NAPSA)—As the number of people with Alzheimer's disease continues to rise, more of their family and friends are finding themselves in an unexpected role—caregiver. According to a new Harris survey, the vast majority of these caregivers feel overwhelmed. However, more information and better communication with the doctor may help.

To learn more about this fast-growing population—and to help them meet the challenges they face—the survey explored the experiences and needs of people who care for loved ones with Alzheimer's disease. Topics ranged from doctor-caregiver communications, to treatments, to support needs. The survey was developed in conjunction with the Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA).

Information/Communication May Help Caregivers Cope

According to the survey, not only do caregivers feel overwhelmed by their loved one's condition, but most (68%) worry that if they weren't around, there would be no one to care for the patient. However, caregivers say there are things that can help—many wish they'd had more information about what to expect from the disease when their loved one was first diagnosed. Caregivers also said that it would have been helpful to have more information from physicians about medications, general information about Alzheimer's disease and caregiving tips at that time.

Results also highlight the importance of communicating with the patient's doctor. Overall, caregivers feel that they and the doctor are a team. However, there is room for more doctor-caregiver communication, especially in terms of treatment options. While most caregivers believe the patient's physician explained the disease and what to expect from symptoms, only half feel the doc-



Caregivers of Alzheimer's disease patients do not always get enough information about available treatments.

tor explained treatments “very well.” Fewer caregivers feel confident that the doctor told them about *all* available treatments.

When it comes to treatment choices, caregivers are most concerned with how well the medication works. Efficacy far outweighs other concerns, such as potential side effects and how many times a day the medication must be taken.

Dr. Alan Dengiz, Director of Geriatric Medicine, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, Ann Arbor, Michigan, agrees that communication is critical, “There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, but there are effective treatments, and caregivers should feel empowered to ask questions about them. For example, the medication that is easiest to take might not get the best results, so caregivers should talk to the physician about which medication may be best for the patient.”

If One Treatment Doesn't Work, Don't Give Up Hope

Nearly half of respondents who said the patient has taken medication reported that it was changed at some point, usually in hopes of better efficacy. In 60% of cases, caregivers said the new medication helped.

Janet Bingham cares for her mother Betty who has Alzheimer's disease. Betty was prescribed medication, but her symptoms didn't get better and some appeared to worsen. Eventually, the doctor stopped Betty's medication and decided to try starting her on Exelon® (rivastigmine tartrate), another medication that is used to treat the symptoms of mild-to-moderate Alzheimer's disease. According to Janet, the results were very visible, and Exelon appears to have slowed the progression of disease symptoms. The most common side effects associated with Exelon are stomach-related, such as nausea and vomiting.

Leading Advocacy Groups are Taking Survey Results to Heart

“We participated in this survey as part of our ongoing quest to ensure that caregivers' needs are met,” said Eric J. Hall, CEO of the AFA. “More and more people find themselves in this role every year, and it's our job to make sure that caregivers can take advantage of the support services that are in place to help them.”

Demonstrating how support can help, the majority of caregivers surveyed found both support groups and educational conferences effective. More information from the survey will be highlighted in an upcoming issue of the AFA's new magazine for caregivers, *Vantage*. To order a copy, call 866-AFA-8484.

To address the findings, the National Family Caregiver's Association and Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation are making available a free resource designed specifically to provide the information that caregivers say they wish they'd had when their loved one was first diagnosed. Free kits are available by calling 877-439-3566 or by visiting www.nfcares.org, www.alzfdn.org, or www.alzheimersdisease.com.

Note to Editors: Betty's story represents the successful treatment with EXELON® (rivastigmine tartrate) of an actual patient with Alzheimer's disease. Because every patient responds differently, results may vary. Safety information: EXELON (rivastigmine tartrate) is approved for mild-to-moderate Alzheimer's disease. EXELON use is associated with significant stomach-related side effects, including nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, and weight loss. If therapy is interrupted for longer than several days, treatment should be reinitiated with the lowest daily dose in order to avoid the possibility of severe vomiting and its potentially serious consequences. In clinical studies, stomach-related side effects occurred more frequently as doses were increased. The weight loss associated with EXELON occurred more commonly among women receiving high doses in clinical studies. Because these side effects can be serious, caregivers should be encouraged to monitor for these adverse events and inform the physician if they occur. People at risk for certain heart conditions or stomach ulcers should notify their doctor before starting EXELON therapy. In clinical studies, some patients also experienced fainting, weakness, and upset stomach. For more information, please see complete prescribing information at www.alzheimersdisease.com.