

Disease of old age causes guilt

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(T.S.P. 8088)

Q. My father is 69 and lives with us. Over the past year, we've noticed that he has become quite forgetful and gets confused easily. Our family doctor says that some people age more rapidly than others. Any suggestions on coping with senility?

A. I can remember years ago when my grandmother began to show a decline in memory and self-sufficiency. It was difficult for the family to watch this remarkable woman who had always been competent, wise and independent, become more and more like a helpless child. We were told that she

was becoming senile with age due to hardening of the arteries. In recent years, research has shown that neither hardening of the arteries nor aging itself cause a person to become forgetful, easily confused and erratic in his or her behavior. Professionals today prefer not even to use the word "senility," but rather, label the decline in mental functioning as "dementia."

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psychology
Dennis Sugrue

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Ten to 20 percent of the cases of dementia can be cured with proper diagnosis and medical care. These reversible dementias may be due to a disguised depression, the interaction of numerous medications being taken at one time, metabolic irregularities, infection, a brain tumor or malnutrition.

The word "Alzheimer's" will soon become common in our vocabularies. It is the name of the most common irreversible dementia and may afflict as many as one out of every 10 people now living — in most cases, when they

are elderly.

Because of the rate of incidence, when the baby boomers enter their sixth and seventh decades, Alzheimer's disease will become a major medical, social and financial problem in this country.

Alzheimer's disease is named after the neurologist who first described it in 1906. The disease causes changes in the structure of the brain's cells, disrupting the normal functioning of the brain.

The disease may follow either a slow or rapid course of decline until death. At this time there is no known way to prevent or cure this condition.

PERHAPS THE most intense suffering caused by Alzheimer's disease is experienced not by the patient but by the family.

Not only are there the physical demands of caring for the patient, but more significantly there is psychological pain of watching a loved one intellectually deteriorate.

Intense guilt emerges because of normal feelings of frustration and resentment. If placement in a nursing home becomes essential for the patient's well-being, the family finds it difficult to remain objective.

The spouse or adult children often torment themselves with the question, "How can I abandon her after all the years she took care of me?"

INFORMATION AND support are available to families touched by Alzheimer's. The Detroit Area Chapter of the Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association may be reached at 840-3378.

There is also an excellent book by Nancy Mace and Peter Rabins titled "The 36-Hour Day: A Family Guide to Caring for Persons with Alzheimer's Disease, Related Dementing Illnesses, and Memory Loss in Later Life."

Dennis Sugrue, Ph.D., is a Farmington Hills resident and a clinical psychologist at Henry Ford Hospital. He welcomes questions and topics for future articles, but is unable to answer questions on an individual basis. Questions and topics may be sent to this newspaper.

Alcohol tolerance lower for elderly

Dear Jo:
Would you please print some "words to the wise" regarding alcohol use and driving for our older readers?

Mrs. D.



gerontology
A. Jolayne Farrell

Dear Mrs. D.:
Because of the many physical and mental changes that go along with growing older, persons in this age group have to pay particular attention to their use of alcohol and its effect upon their activities of daily living, particularly driving.

Older persons have a decreased tolerance to this drug and therefore must drink less. Along with this decreased tolerance, they often have health problems that require either prescribed or over-the-counter medications. Alcohol

reacts with these drugs and interferes with their desired effects. For example, narcotics, tranquilizers, antidepressants, antihistamines and sedatives all become more potent with alcohol.

It takes about 14 hours for a younger person weighing 150 pounds to use up or metabolize the amount of alcohol found in four ounces of wine or 12 ounces of beer or 1 1/4 ounces of dis-

tilled spirits. For older persons and for those who weigh less, the process takes longer. Trying to hasten the process by drinking coffee, exercising or taking a cold shower may make one feel more alert — but the amount of alcohol circulating in the bloodstream remains the same.

Fortunately, this problem is no longer being ignored — and the population in general is trying to do something to

keep inebriated people from getting behind the wheels of their automobiles. Party hosts and hostesses are serving more soda and sparkling waters as well as soft drinks. When anyone at the party shows signs of intoxication, he or she is prevented from driving home. The safety of this person becomes the responsibility of everyone at the party.

So perhaps my "words to the wise" for older persons who are planning to drink socially and drive home are: plan your evening as to how much you are going to eat and drink; never drink on an empty stomach as this causes the alcohol to be absorbed too quickly; sip one or two drinks over the course of the evening; freshen drinks with ice and mix only; and eat while drinking. This way you'll feel better about yourself.

volunteers

The Oakland County Volunteer Bureau (OCVB) has a current file of volunteer opportunities for more than 200 agencies. Non-profit organizations needing assistance may list with the bureau. For more information about these and other volunteer openings, call the bureau at 642-7272.

PARENTING VOLUNTEER — Experienced parents are needed by William Beaumont Hospital's Perinatal Positive Parenting Program to meet

with expecting or first-time parents, offering support and instruction on parenting. Four hours a week, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekdays. Evenings or Saturdays are possible. Training. Phone 642-7272.

DOCENT — If you're 18 or older, enjoy working with others and like animals, the Detroit Zoo needs you to give zoo tours and work in the Log Cabin Learning Center, a classroom/museum facility. Minimum of 50 hours per year.

Hours 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Training begins in February. Phone 642-7272.

HOSPITAL VOLUNTEERS — St. Joseph Mercy Hospital needs many volunteers in several areas: Gift shop, nurses station, patient guide/escort service, safety seat program and emergency. Four hours a week, same day and hours. Must be at least 18. Phone 642-7272.

INTERVIEWER — The OCVB needs someone experienced in volun-

teer work to handle face-to-face or on-phone interviews with prospective volunteers and to solicit volunteer opportunities for Oakland County agencies. Friendly, empathetic and a good listener.

CRISIS INTERVENTION — Madison Heights Police Department needs area residents for its program to aid victims of crime and traumatic events. Twenty-five hours of instruction will be given. Volunteers on call two days a month. Phone 642-7272.

Winter wipers prevent freeze up

A group of New England researchers familiar with test procedures in frigid weather conditions have provided the latest evidence that specially designed "winter" windshield wipers are superior in performance to conventional wiper blades.

After a three-month test last winter, 67 percent of the employees of the U.S. Army Cold Regions Research and En-

gineering Laboratory in Hanover, N.H., who participated in the test, agreed that "winter" blades were distinctly better.

"The build-up of ice and snow on regular wipers annually hampers driving visibility for millions of Americans," according to Larry Koles, manager of technical programs for Anco Wipers, which conducted the tests. "The results

of this test provide further proof that winter blades will enhance safe motoring in inclement weather."

"Winter" blades, rapidly becoming popular across the country, are designed with a rubber "boot" that completely encloses the metal superstructure of the blade. This rubber case keeps the blade flexible by preventing ice or snow build-up on the moving

parts of the blade. With regular wipers, moisture will freeze around "joints" on the blade, and the wiping element will not clean evenly across the curvature of a windshield.

The Cold Regions Laboratory employees installed one "winter" blade and one regular blade on their personal vehicles.

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First Community Ed. Center 14501 Parkside
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Tues., Oct. 2 9:30-11:30 am
Wed., Oct. 3 9:30-11:30 am
Mon., Oct. 1 9:30-11:30 am; 6-8 pm
Tues., Oct. 2 9:30-11:30 am
Wed., Oct. 3 9:30-11:30 am; 6-8 pm
Thurs., Oct. 4 9:30-11:30 am