ALZHEIMER'S & DEMENTIA RESOURCE CENTER

Getting a Proper Diagnosis

The diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease is one of excluding other conditions that may be responsible for producing the symptoms of memory loss, confusion, personality change, etc. There is no specific "test" that can be performed to diagnose Alzheimer's disease and since there are numerous conditions that mimic the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, a thorough evaluation is recommended in order to rule out any other condition that may be treatable. The family should discuss the patient's symptoms with the family physician first, who should perform a basic assessment of the patient's physical and mental status. It is recommended that the patient be examined by a specialist such as a geriatrician or a neurologist, who are specially trained and experienced with dementia or Alzheimer's disease. The specialist will perform a series of procedures to rule out other disorders that may be causing the early Alzheimer's disease-like symptoms. A proper testing process includes, but is not limited to the following:

Medical History:
- Interview with the patient and/or close family members
- Gathers information about the patient's past and present health conditions
- Gathers information about the patient's family history of illness
- Determines the patient's symptoms and when they first appeared

Mental Status Evaluation:
- Determines orientation to time and place
- Evaluates cognitive abilities
- Tests short term memory
- Tests ability to perform simple calculations

Physical Exam:
- General condition and nutrition status are determined
- Blood pressure and pulse readings are screened
- Rules out heart conditions, hardening of the arteries, and/or kidney, thyroid, and liver diseases that may cause dementia-like symptoms

Laboratory Tests:
- Blood and urine tests are performed
- Determines the presence of infections, anemia, liver or kidney disorders, diabetes, nutritional deficiencies, and abnormal hormone levels

Brain Activity and Imaging:
- CT scan or MRI can show brain atrophy, shrinkage, tumors, strokes, or blood clots
- PET or SPECT scan allows brain functioning to be evaluated
- EEG shows brain wave activity

Neurological Evaluation:
- Testing of the nervous system
- Evaluates coordination, sensory abilities, speech, eye movement, muscle tone and strength
- Rules out Parkinson's disease, stroke, and brain tumors