



ESTHER BUSH

Alzheimer's disease

This month, the "Take Charge of Your Health Today" page focuses on Alzheimer's disease. Erricka Hager, health advocate, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO, both of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, spoke about this topic.



ERRICKA HAGER

EB: Good morning, Erricka. Alzheimer's disease is a health topic that we've never covered before. I'm glad we're taking the time today to discuss this disease, efforts to learn more about this disease and the resources available locally for our readers and their families. This month's page is filled with information and current research about Alzheimer's. It even features the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC), a local resource with which our health education office has previously partnered. I'm certain we'll be successful in providing readers with a brief introduction and overview of Alzheimer's and ways they can find support in the Pittsburgh area.

EH: Yes, Ms. Bush. Before reading this page's content, I didn't know much about Alzheimer's disease. I think one of the reasons we've been running the "Take Charge" page in the Courier for seven years is to connect readers with health information, resources and to disseminate current research. I also think people need to know that they are never "alone" when they or their families experience health problems. More than 5 million people are living with the disease in the United States, and over 400,000 of those people live in Pennsylvania. It's safe to say that most of the Courier readers have heard of Alzheimer's. Personally, I've known one person who was affected by Alzheimer's. I always wished I was able to provide more support to my loved ones in their time of need.

EB: I'm sure your loved ones appreciated all the support you provided during such a tough time. I, too, didn't realize that Alzheimer's affects the African American community so disproportionately. But medical advances and understanding of diseases through research continues to be so needed.

EH: I agree. Dr. Cohen discusses advancements in both understanding the genetic markers of the disease and how technology has changed the way the disease is diagnosed. The future of how and when diseases like Alzheimer's are detected and how it is treated through research is here. I now know more about local resources and support groups like ADRC and all the wonderful things they offer to people and families affected by the disease. I feel equipped to refer any personal contacts as well as any of our health education office clients. As you mentioned earlier, I'm also eager to continue working with ADRC in a multitude of ways in order to continue to educate the communities we serve.

EB: I second that. Thanks for having this chat with me, Erricka. We've provided some great information and local resources for families who are affected by Alzheimer's. I look forward to chatting with you next month as we discuss Down syndrome.

Stop, and take a moment to ASK: Do you know anyone with Alzheimer's disease? With the Alzheimer's Association reporting that more than 5 million people in the United States are living with the disease, there is a good chance that everyone knows someone who has the disease or is affected by it.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia. Dementia describes symptoms of memory loss and the loss of other cognitive abilities that are serious enough to affect everyday life. Though researchers do not know exactly what causes Alzheimer's disease, it is characterized by abnormal deposits of proteins in the brain called amyloid plaque and tau tangles. It is a disease that gets worse over time, leading to breakdowns in cognitive and physical functions and, eventually, death. There is no cure for Alzheimer's, but treatment for its symptoms is available. Because the greatest known risk factor is age, early diagnosis allows early treatment and preparation for the changes the disease brings.

Recent developments in technology have completely changed the way Alzheimer's disease is diagnosed. A few decades ago, Alzheimer's disease could not be diagnosed until the brain was examined after death. It was nearly impossible to know the early markers and



Caring for someone with Alzheimer's or other dementias is exceptionally demanding.

risk factors. But with the advances in neuroimaging, early diagnosis is now possible. Now that they have the tools, researchers are trying to understand much more about Alzheimer's disease—including why African Americans are twice as likely as non-Latinx whites to develop the disease.

Ann D. Cohen, PhD, assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, is one of the researchers involved in a study trying to understand more about Alzheimer's

disease and why it disproportionately affects African Americans.

"Because African Americans have higher rates of Alzheimer's and are often diagnosed much later in the progression of the disease, we want to know more about the disease specifically in this population," Dr. Cohen says. "For many reasons, African Americans are less likely to be involved in research. They're at greater risk for developing the disease, and we need to know why so we can

create better interventions and treatments. We know from research that the late stages of Alzheimer's looks the same in all patients. But we want to know if there's a difference in the early stages of the disease between whites and African Americans and if the disease progresses differently."

Dr. Cohen and colleagues use neuroimaging to look at the brains of people with and without memory loss symptoms. They use positron emission tomography (PET) scans to check

for proteins in the brain that are associated with Alzheimer's. They also use magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to look for structural changes in the brain. Neuroimaging studies have shown that many people have the pathology of Alzheimer's in their brains—but some people develop the disease and others do not. Researchers like Dr. Cohen want to understand why Alzheimer's develops in some people and not in others because they think it will provide the key to preventing anyone from getting the disease. To do this, Dr. Cohen and researchers like her need people to help them further the study of Alzheimer's.

In their study (details about the study can be found elsewhere on this page), Dr. Cohen and her colleagues are looking for people all along the spectrum of Alzheimer's disease—people who show no symptoms, people with mild symptoms and people who are living with the disease.

"We're in a special time in the field of Alzheimer's disease research," says Dr. Cohen. "We've developed enough technology where we're about to understand a lot more about how this disease progresses. But what we need are people who are willing to selflessly give up their time to participate in these studies. Those are the people who are really going to help us understand the disease and how to prevent it."

Community Resource Spotlight: University of Pittsburgh Alzheimer Disease Research Center

Alzheimer's disease and related disorders can have devastating effects on individuals, families and communities. These effects can be physical, emotional or even financial. Research has shown that providing information and support to affected persons and communities is important. This support can help to ease the burden of Alzheimer's disease and related conditions. The outreach core of the University of Pittsburgh Alzheimer Disease

Research Center (ADRC) is a key resource for up-to-date information and referrals to support services within the region.

ADRC has a commitment to increase public awareness about Alzheimer's disease. The center proudly offers a community lecture series two times a year. Its Walter Allen Commu-

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH Alzheimer Disease Research Center



Moving Toward a Cure

nity Lecture Series brings researchers and clinical experts to community settings. This creates interactive and educational programs. It is named in honor of Walter Allen, a prominent African American photographer

who worked for the New Pittsburgh Courier in the 1950s and 1960s and later died with dementia.

The center also provides speakers on Alzheimer's disease to community groups around the city. The center accepts speaker requests from church groups, community programs and senior organizations on a year-round

basis. ADRC also maintains a caregiver support group, which is affiliated with the Alzheimer's Association. The group meets on the last Tuesday of the month from 6-7:30 p.m. at the Hill House, 2nd Floor, 1835 Centre Ave. The center's support group and community education programs are free and open to the public.

For more information, or to request a speaker, contact Melita Terry, outreach coordinator, at 412-692-2712, or visit www.adrc.pitt.edu.

HONORING Black History Month

Alzheimer Disease Research Center

& Alzheimer's Association

Jointly Presents

Coffee and Conversations with Dr. Keisha Ward

"African Americans and Alzheimer's Disease—Our Future Health"

While we take the time during Black History month to reflect on the achievements of the African Americans in our communities, it is also an ideal time to consider the future health of the African American community, and the diseases that will challenge its growth, specifically Alzheimer's. Please come and join us for some good conversation and coffee.

Crazy Mocha
1836 Centre Avenue
Pittsburgh PA 15219
Wednesday, February 28, 2018
5:00pm—7:00pm



Please RSVP by February 21, 2018 to
Melita Terry at 412 692-2712 or terrymh@upmc.edu

Connectomics in Brain Aging

Are you African American and between the ages of 50-89? If so, you may be eligible to participate in a study. Researchers want to determine how different parts of the brain are connected and understand how these connections allow us to think, behave and feel. This study involves undergoing brain imaging and completing behavioral evaluations. Compensation is provided. This study requires three visits over three days in Oakland. For more information, or if you are interested in participating, visit <https://pittplusme.org/studyarms/publicdetails?guid=abdb4de3-0e00-49e6-b0a0-a3ca-2d6e7c2a>. When you click "I'm interested," a member of the Pitt+Me team will contact you.

All of Us Pennsylvania

New Precision Medicine Initiative Launched

The University of Pittsburgh CTSI, UPMC, and Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh are proud to partner with the National Institutes of Health All of Us Research Program. As part of this exciting new precision medicine initiative, All of Us Pennsylvania is a local effort to enroll more than 120,000 participants in our region. Nationally, the goal is to enroll 1 million+ people. Over the coming months you will be reading and hearing a lot more on the "Take Charge" Courier pages. For now, we invite you to learn more at joinallofuspa.com.