

Report Details Alzheimer's Stats

Forty-three Percent Of People Over 85 Have The Disease

Some 5.4 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease, with the vast majority over the age of 65, driving costs and care considerations for a large number of seniors, according to the Alzheimer's Association "2011 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures" report.

These levels are expected to escalate in the coming years as more people reach retirement age, the authors said.

Right now, the numbers are especially staggering for those Americans over the age of 85. Of that subgroup, 43 percent have Alzheimer's. The report noted that almost two-thirds of all Americans living with Alzheimer's or other dementias are women. This is due to the fact that women live longer than men, on average, the report said.

People with fewer years of education appear to be at higher risk for Alzheimer's and other dementias than those with more years of education.

"Some researchers believe that a higher level of education provides a 'cognitive reserve' that enables individuals to better compensate for changes in the brain that could result in Alzheimer's or another dementia," the report said.

"However, others believe that these differences in educational attainment and dementia risk reflect such factors as increased risk for disease in general and less access to medical care in lower socioeconomic groups."

As far as the racial factors in who gets Alzheimer's, the research showed that while most people in the United States with the disease and other dementias are Caucasian, it is older African-Americans and Hispanics that are proportionally more likely than older Caucasians to have Alzheimer's and related illnesses.

"No known genetic factors can ac-

count for these prevalence differences across racial groups," the report said. "Instead, health conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes, lower levels of education, and other differences in socioeconomic characteristics that are risk factors for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are more common in older African-Americans and Hispanics than in older whites," the report said.

As far as the future is concerned, it is important to realize that the estimated annual incidence (rate of developing disease in a one-year period) of

Alzheimer's disease appears to increase dramatically with age, from around 53 new cases per 1,000 people aged 65 to 74, to 170 new cases per 1,000 people aged 75 to 84, to 231 new cases per 1,000 people over age 85.

In 2000, there were an estimated 411,000 new cases of Alzheimer's disease, compared with 2010, when an estimated 454,000 new cases appeared, a 10 percent rise over the decade.

By 2030, new cases should rise to 615,000 and by 2050, 959,000, the report said.

—Patrick Connoles

Congress Seeks Observation Stays Change

A bill introduced in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives would ensure that time spent under observation status in a hospital would count toward satisfying the three-day inpatient hospital requirement for coverage of skilled nursing facility (SNF) services under Medicare.

Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) introduced the Improving Access to Medicare Coverage Act of 2011 in the Senate, while Reps. Joe Courtney (D-Conn.) and Tom Latham (R-Iowa) did the same in the House.

The measure seeks to recognize the fact that patients are often kept much longer than the prescribed limit for observation stays and are not informed of their admission status. Advocates for the legislation at the American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL) pointed out that from 2007-2009, the

number of patients spending four or more days under observation status doubled.

Patients who need to enter a SNF following an observation stay face the possibility that their care in the facility will not be covered by Medicare Part A because of the lack of hospital classification as an inpatient.

"This can result in the possibility of not receiving appropriate and necessary skilled nursing care. In some instances, patients arrive at a nursing facility, and because Medicare will not cover the benefit, they are forced to pay out-of-pocket,"

AHCA/NCAL said.

"When patients should be focusing on their recovery, far too many are caught off guard by this ambiguous policy," Snowe said. "This bipartisan legislation provides much needed clarity and will ensure that patients receive the full coverage they deserve."

