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STORY PHOTO

Alzheimer's, Dementia Rise Faster Than Expected, Report Says

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By Elizabeth Lopatto



Sept. 21 (Bloomberg) -- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias will afflict 35.6 million people in 2010, about 10 percent more than previously estimated because of a higher number of cases in developing countries than doctors realized, researchers said.

The number of dementia sufferers may almost double every 20 years to 115.4 million in 2050, researchers at

Alzheimer's Disease International said in a report. The report's authors had previously projected lower numbers in a 2005 article in the *Lancet*.

Companies such as **Johnson & Johnson**, **Eli Lilly & Co.**, **Baxter International Inc.** and **Bristol-Myers Squibb Co.** are developing treatments to target the disease. The report recommends that the **World Health Organization** declare dementia a health priority, and that countries including the U.S. develop a plan for dealing with the greater numbers of dementia patients.

"People, the government, the community need to understand that these numbers are an emergency," said Daisy Acosta, the chairwoman of the London-based Alzheimer's patients advocacy group.

Lower and middle-income countries have the fastest increase in prevalence in the next 20 years, the report said. The poorest countries in Latin America will see the biggest increases of 134 to 146 percent. The new numbers are due to better data available since there weren't many studies of Latin America, Africa, Russia, the Middle East, and Indonesia, the report said.

Care Costs Rising

Alzheimer's disease and other dementias cost \$315 billion a year, according to an estimate from Sweden's Karolinska Institute cited by the paper. Dementia care costs are rising fastest in low and middle income countries, where per capita income is \$11,905 or less, the report found.

Patients and their families currently have few options. The drugs approved in the U.S. to treat Alzheimer's ease symptoms for 6 to 12 months at most, according to the Alzheimer's Association. If U.S. health officials and the WHO develop plans for dealing with the increase of dementia, other countries will follow suit, Acosta said.

It has been difficult to get attention from global health organizations, because they often focus on reducing deaths rather than on treating disability, said Alzheimer's Association Chief Executive Officer Harry Johns.

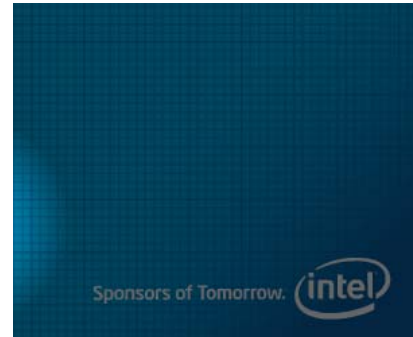
"The very fact that people are older works against them," Johns said. Many Alzheimer's patients have spouses or children who provide their care, quitting their jobs to do so, he said. Between 15 percent and 32 percent of caregivers develop depression, as a result of the strains of providing for the needs of Alzheimer's patients.

WHO Priority

"We already think dementia is a priority within WHO," said Tarun Dua, a medical officer at the WHO's department of mental health and substance abuse. WHO included Alzheimer's disease as a priority condition when it launched the Mental Health Gap Action Program in October 2008 to bolster care for a range of ailments including mental health, neurology and substance abuse, she said.

"The burden of these disorders is very high and the resources are scarce, especially in low and middle income countries," Dua said in a telephone interview.

About 5.2 million people in the U.S. have Alzheimer's disease, according to the



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Chicago-based Alzheimer's association. The first symptom of Alzheimer's may be mild forgetfulness. As the condition progresses, it begins to interfere with patients' lives as they forget how to brush their teeth, change their clothes, or recognize once-familiar people.

"We'll be spending the equivalent of the stimulus package every two years if we don't address this," Johns said.

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Last Updated: September 21, 2009 00:01 EDT

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