

Preface

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a devastating and dehumanizing illness affecting increasingly large numbers of elderly and even middle-aged persons in a worldwide epidemic. *Alzheimer's Disease: A Physician's Guide to Practical Management* was written by selected clinicians and scientists who represent some of the world's leading centers of excellence in AD research. The editors are proud and grateful for their profound contributions.

This book is particularly designed to assist physicians and other health-care professionals in the evaluation, assessment, and treatment of individuals with AD. At the same time, by illuminating the basic scientific background, we hope to provide state-of-the art information about the disease and possible future therapeutic strategies. The recent psychiatric treatment aspects of AD are also clearly presented.

Because the early diagnosis of the dementia process is now considered of increasing importance, we focus particularly in several chapters on early changes and preclinical conditions, such as mild cognitive impairment and predementia AD.

The pathway toward reaching the goal of prevention of the disease is arduous and requires patience and fortitude. Patients and their families are not well served by overenthusiastic releases from companies or from scientists at a stage of research that can offer only experimental and animal data as grounds for optimism. Nevertheless, it is necessary to be informed about what might be coming up in the future. For this reason, comprehensive and timely information about potential future options for prevention and treatment of AD is included. A number of basic scientists discuss their areas of research in this volume. As a result, we have provided our readers with broad insight into such new therapeutic directions as stem cell therapy and other unique strategies.

AD imposes a tremendously painful burden on caregivers as well as friends. The consequences of providing this care are associated with deep feelings of isolation, loneliness, and despair. This has led us to include treatment of these aspects in this volume. We also provide some guidance for caregivers and medical providers on how to overcome the breakdown of communication that the illness creates.

It was our primary goal as editors to provide established scientific and clinical knowledge in comprehensible language and to touch upon more recent objects of research. As the reader may notice, we also cover aspects of the disease that have not yet been discussed in the available textbooks on AD.

We certainly hope that *Alzheimer's Disease: A Physician's Guide to Practical Management* will serve as a rich source of information that can be utilized by physicians in their daily practice of diagnosing and treating patients with AD. We must particularly bear in mind that the disease still appears to be underdiagnosed and undertreated (1).

Supporting physicians in their management of AD is a way of helping patients and families to live better with the disease and to cope with the problems it poses. As we all know, dealing with an AD patient can be an extremely sad and frustrating task. Perhaps this book, by providing practical guidance, can make the task a little easier and help to "keep our hearts open in hell," as a caregiver once said (2).

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1. Reichman, W.E.: Current pharmacologic options for patients with Alzheimer's disease. *Ann Gen Hosp Psychiatry* 2003; 2: 1.
2. Cited from: Thobaben, M.: Helping families understand and communicate with family members who suffer from dementia. *Home Care Provid* 1999; 4: 139–139,146.

Alzheimer's Disease

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