

India's fast ageing population is prone to Alzheimer's

20 September 2017 | News

On World Alzheimer's Day, the Indian Society for Clinical Research (ISCR) highlights the need to intensify Alzheimer's research to prepare for the impending population shift.



According to the India Ageing Report 2017, the elderly population in India is growing at 3 per cent annually, a faster rate of growth than other age categories. This shift in population age structure means that the burden of Alzheimer's in India is set to increase given that the disease primarily occurs in patients over the age of 65 years.

"Alzheimer's carries with it significant economic and social costs. As our country and the global population ages, the burden of Alzheimer's disease will continue to increase and put additional pressures on the limited resources available to tackle the situation. Women are expected to bear the worst of the impact in India, as elderly women in the country experience higher life expectancies than their male counterparts, while also encountering neglect as they age. A 2016 Lancet study on healthy life expectancy revealed that while women in India have a higher overall life expectancy than men, women also spend more years in ill health and disability than men," said Dr Chirag Trivedi, President of ISCR. "We need to intensify clinical research efforts to look for a cure for Alzheimer's." There has been no US FDA approved drug for Alzheimer's since 2003 and although there are several trials currently underway, a cure is still many years away.

Every year, September 21 is marked around the globe as World Alzheimer's Day. Alzheimer's disease is a progressive, neurodegenerative disease that affects cognitive functioning, and in its worst forms, can severely interfere with day-to-day living. It is the most common form of dementia in the elderly and accounts for 60 to 80 percent of dementia cases. There is no cure for Alzheimer's and currently available therapies cannot stop memory loss, however, getting treatment in time can slow down the progression of the disease. Alzheimer's is not a normal part of ageing, therefore, it is important to be aware of the warning signs and initiate treatment at the earliest possible as the condition keeps deteriorating with time.

Census data indicates that about 71 per cent of India's elderly reside in rural regions, with the exceptions of Goa and Mizoram. States ranking lower on the economic ladder, such as Odisha, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have a larger percentage of the rural elderly. These areas are hard to reach, with poor road and logistical access. As a result, the ageing population in these areas lack sufficient access to quality care.

"Most of our elderly live in areas which are hard to reach, making access to care and monitoring extremely complicated. We also lack specific and detailed data pertaining to these populations, which would otherwise help us devise ways to care for them and make their daily lives and the lives of their family members easier. Research logically emerges as the only way to confront these challenges we face – the more we know, the more we can do," added Dr. Trivedi