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## Is Alzheimer's disease the default diagnosis for confused elders?

By Carol Bradley Bursack, Health Guide  
Thursday, May 24, 2012

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Alzheimer's organizations have worked diligently to raise public awareness of the disease. Their efforts are paying off handsomely. I'd challenge nearly anyone to find a friend or neighbor who hasn't heard enough about Alzheimer's disease to give some type of description of the symptoms. The downside of this awareness, however, is that even doctors can jump to possibly faulty conclusions when they see an elderly person showing signs of memory loss or significant confusion.

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A recent article in the *Detroit Free Press* features Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D., head of Wayne State University's Institute of Gerontology. In a paper for the journal *Clinical Gerontology*, Lichtenberg, according to the article, "highlighted two case studies: in one, a man's bouts of confusion and agitation in his late 70s were caused by illness and painful cellulitis, not Alzheimer's; in the other, an 87-year-old woman, who seemed suddenly confused, was suffering from depression."

Sleep apnea is also considered a culprit in the misdiagnosis of people with dementia-like symptoms. The *Free Press* article discusses the case of a man who had undiagnosed Lewy-body dementia. His symptoms were exaggerated by sleep apnea. According to the article, once the sleep apnea was treated his dementia symptoms improved dramatically.

Urinary tract infections and medication reactions or interactions are not uncommon causes of dementia-like symptoms. The *Free Press* article mentions several other possible symptoms that can throw off a doctor's diagnosis. These include stroke or vascular disease, fever, depression, blood pressure changes, surgery, tumors and drug and/or alcohol abuse.

Getting the correct diagnosis is important

It's vital that individuals receive a correct diagnosis. If there is an underlying problem causing dementia-like symptoms, the real problem should be properly treated. Also, with a correct Alzheimer's diagnosis, there are drugs that help slow the cognitive decline for some people.

It may be a good idea for a person with dementia symptoms to see a neurologist for a second opinion. The last thing we'd want is for people's awareness about the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease to be the underlying factor in a misdiagnosis.

For more information about Carol visit [www.mindingourelers.com](http://www.mindingourelers.com) or [www.mindingourelersblogs.com](http://www.mindingourelersblogs.com).

Source:

Erb, R. (2012, May 17) Diagnosis of Alzheimer's isn't always accurate. *Detroit Free Press*. Retrieved from <http://www.freep.com/article/20120517/NEWS06/205170720/Diagnosis-of-Alzheimer-s-isn-t-always-accurate>

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