

# Alzheimer's Disease redefines term "senility"

(Editor's note: This is the first of two parts dealing with Alzheimer's Disease. Part two will examine how the disease affects the surrounding community.)

By Shelley Ball  
Of The Print

Everyone has days where nothing seems to go right. Forgetting dates or names of people, misplacing objects such as car keys, shoes or checkbooks—these are just a few of the relatively minor hassles people experience from time to time.

But what about those people who, for example, get up to go for a walk and forget where they're going, even why they got up to begin with? To the people who become irritable because they can't understand why they are no longer able to remember events and places that were once a very important part of their lives—how are these cir-

cumstances explained?

Had this question been asked several years ago, the term "senility" would have been the answer. Today, however, the circumstances described above are considered symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease.

Although Alzheimer's Disease has been around since 1906, when it was first discovered by German neurologist Alois Alzheimer, only recently is the public becoming more aware of the illness.

While the term "senility" has been used in the past as a catch-all word in describing unusual behavior of older citizens, Alzheimer's Disease is a specific description of a progressive, incurable illness currently affecting more than four million people over the age of 65 in this country.

The disease affects the neurons that make up the cerebral cortex, or outer layer, of the brain. For unknown reasons these neurons break down and become tangled, and they emit a substance, called plaque, which permanently seals off the neurons, making it impossible for them to transmit electrical signals.

"It's like taking a hose and tying a knot in it, and then it becomes shrouded in cement," Rodger Mainz, clinical psychologist, said. Mainz, who just moved to Oregon from Kansas two months ago,

is now on staff at the Willamette Valley Family Center, P.C., located in Oregon City.

Research has shown the cholinergic neurons are affected by Alzheimer's Disease. These neurons can be found in the frontal, parietal and temporal lobes of the brain, the same lobes that the disease has been found in.

Each lobe of the brain controls certain body functions. The frontal lobe is responsible for abstract thinking, the parietal involves spatial orientation and the temporal lobe controls speech and auditory memory, to name a few.

The symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease, then, stem from the functions of these lobes. Some symptoms include increasing memory loss, disorientation, becoming more concrete in thinking (loss of abstract thinking), increasing irritability, taking on a defensive attitude toward the disease, and entering into a confused state.

These symptoms are grouped into general stages of the disease, with memory loss as the first and most common stage, to total dependency and hospitalization as the final stage. But Mainz said Alzheimer's Disease patients don't all develop the same symptoms or experience the same stages in a particular order, just as their conditions don't all progress at the same rate.

"You know the saying, 'a rose is a rose is a rose.' Well, an Alzheimer's is not an Alzheimer's is not an

Alzheimer's," he said.

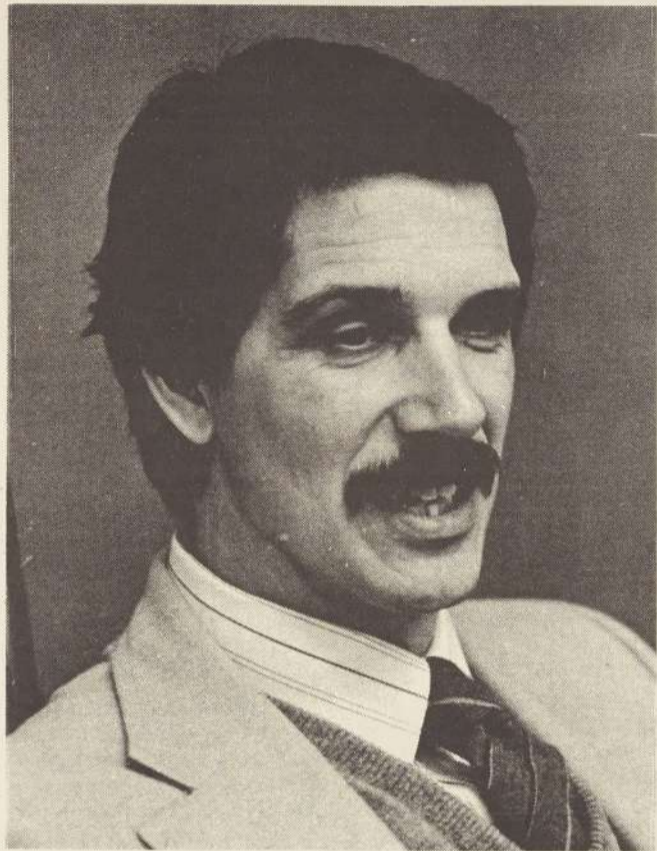
In some cases what are thought to be symptoms of the disease are really the effects of the problem. Stress, depression and vitamin deficiency are some cases Mainz mentioned that could be mistaken for producing Alzheimer's Disease symptoms. For patients with the disease, however, stress and depression seem to speed up the rate of the disease's progression.

The final stage of Alzheimer's Disease, as mentioned above, results in the patient becoming totally dependent on others for the needs of washing, going to the bathroom, and feeding. "It's like taking care of a 155 pound baby," Mainz said.

In most cases patients who have progressed this far are placed in nursing homes, where they may spend their days talking out loud about past events as though they were happening now, or are resting quietly, having been sedated by various drugs in order to control violent behavior.

This violent behavior is often expressed in the form of a childlike temper tantrum, as the capacity for adult emotions, including the ability to reason, is another function in the cerebral cortex that is susceptible to the effects of Alzheimer's Disease.

Mainz estimated the life expectancy of individuals in the advanced stage to be about three to four years, after which they may die of a heart attack, the most common form of death among Alzheimer patients.



Rodger Mainz, clinical psychologist

Photo by Joel Miller

## Campus awareness goal of week

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International Awareness Day will concentrate on enlightening students about the customs and cultures of foreign students. Aiming towards a more informed and cohesive student body will be a food fair, fashion show and music festival.

The Women's Resource Center will extend its invitation to an open house on Thursday. Publicizing their services will be a Resource Fair, noon concert, workshop on "Forming Co-ops and Networks" and a seminar focusing on the "Dilemma of Work and Home."

Concluding the week will be Senior Awareness Day. Listed for the events are, "Arts for Elders," a hobby fair and a surprise guest speaker.

Debbie Derr cites the purpose of the activities partially as a promotional medium. "The week in general is to build an awareness of the campus, that we have special people and services and anyone interested should know what's available," she said.

Another focus for the events is to widen the knowledge of the general population concerning the needs and differences of particular groups. Derr stated,

"If I can get one person to come to each event and gain something new from it, to say to themselves, 'I didn't know that,' then I will consider it a success." She hopes to, "build an appreciation for the differences in students on campus."

The response for Handicapped Awareness Week in the past has been mixed. Derr hopes to reach a larger population this year with such varying topics. Most of the events will be held in the Community Center, and Derr hopes to at-

tract some of the traffic in the mall. She would like to attract as many staff members as possible as well as the student population.

Anyone interested in learning about what is being offered and the scheduling, can attain information at the resource centers or call PIO for assistance.

Volunteers are welcome to lend a hand. All events are open to the community and are free of charge, excluding a \$3 fee for the Women's Focus Seminar.

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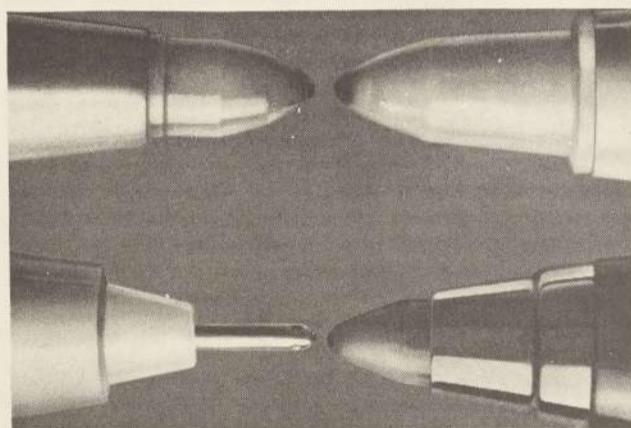
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