

# HEALTH

## Parkinson's Disease Hits Young and Old Alike

New therapies improve quality of life

BY LISA MANN, RN

It started out innocently enough. She noticed her left hand would shake when she was watching TV. She felt some stiffness and seemed to be tripping over her own feet. Nothing too serious, but she thought she would go to the clinic just to be sure. After all, she wasn't elderly; at 50 years old, she shouldn't be tottering around like a granny. What she didn't expect was to be diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

A lot of Americans were introduced to Parkinson's disease when they saw Muhammad Ali light the Olympic Torch in Atlanta during the 1996 Olympic Games. We remember seeing the champ shaking, walking with a decidedly uneven gait, and looking rigid as he bravely climbed the steps to begin the games.

Americans got another glimpse at Parkinson's disease when actor Michael J. Fox announced he was a victim, afflicted in his 30s. Other well-known people, such as the late Pope John Paul II, former Attor-



Dr. Kathryn Chung (right) and a clinic patient at the Oregon Health Sciences University Parkinson Center.

ney General Janet Reno, Billy Graham, and Earth Wind and Fire's Maurice White all suffer from Parkinson's disease. Yet most people are unaware of the potentially disabling characteristics and devastating ef-

fects of Parkinson's disease on its victims and their families.

Here are some fast facts on Parkinson's disease:

Parkinson's disease is more common

than multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy and Lou Gehrig's disease combined. More than 1.5 million Americans are affected by Parkinson's disease with 60,000 new cases diagnosed every year. Parkinson's disease affects the young as well as the old.

Parkinson's disease strikes regardless of race, ethnicity, social status, or economic resources.

The Parkinson Center of Oregon at OHSU is a world leader in Parkinson research and is led by perhaps the world's most esteemed doctors and health care professionals in the field.

What we see is people shake, but there's much more to Parkinson's disease than that. Parkinson's disease symptoms may include a shake or resting tremor, but also involve muscle rigidity and slowness. Eventually, balance and coordination become problems. Less recognized symptoms can be equally debilitating. These non-motor symptoms may include depression, anxiety, pain, urinary problems, sleeping difficulties, low blood pressure, changes in facial expression and speech, and potentially, cognitive impairment.

The disease can be difficult to diagnose and a challenge to treat. It is suspected that for every one person diagnosed, two people go undiagnosed. Too often, the

shaking, slowness, stiffness, and balance problems are misinterpreted simply to be a part of aging.

There are medications that work well to control the movement symptoms of Parkinson's disease. Non-pharmacological therapies—physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy, particularly a good stretching and exercise program—can help too. There is emerging research that suggests that exercise may slow or deter Parkinson's disease.

The Parkinson Center of Oregon at OHSU collaborates with centers throughout the nation and world to help all who suffer from Parkinson's disease. Through education, comprehensive care practices, and research, new therapies are being developed to improve the quality of life for people and families with Parkinson's disease, and to one day, hopefully, slow, stop, and cure the disease.

Seeking and receiving appropriate medical care is the key to making a difference in the impact Parkinson's disease has. If you or someone you know exhibits the symptoms described above, urge them to see their physician and seek a neurological exam.

Lisa Mann is Patient Care Coordinator at the Parkinson Center of Oregon at Oregon Health Sciences University.



### Wellness Village Promotes Good Health

Sharon Smith (from left), Aisha Campbell, Muna Sadik and Rose Pickett attend the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Wellness Village sponsored by the African American Health Coalition. Local medical care providers offered free health care services, screening and advice during the Saturday event at the Blazer Boys and Girls Club on Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

### Fight Breast Cancer With Exams

The chance that a woman will be diagnosed with breast cancer over her lifetime is 1 in 8. However, many are diagnosed with breast cancer, too.

Mammograms every year for women aged 40-70, especially for high-risk women who have had a first-degree relative diagnosed with breast cancer, are encouraged in order to help detect breast cancer at the earliest and most treatable stages. Mammograms may detect cancer, but they do not prevent other cancers.

While the causes of breast cancer are still unknown, the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs officer the following tips that may help reduce the risk of developing the disease:

Don't smoke, exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy weight. Studies show that excess weight may increase the risk of breast cancer.

Eat fresh fruits and vegetables daily. The fiber, antioxidants and other nutrients found in fresh fruits and vegetables may help reduce the risk of breast cancer and some other cancers.

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