Asian dementia on the rise in S’pore

First global study of Asian dementia among participants recruited here shows about half have increased risk of the brain disease

By Chantal Sajan

SINGAPORE – A first global study of Asian dementia among participants recruited here shows about half have increased risk of the brain disease.

The study, launched in April 2022 at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Medicine (LKSOM), Research Institute for Aging (RIA), and the National University Hospital (NUH), is the first large-scale study to be conducted in Asia and only the second in the world to study Asian dementia.

The study, led by the Dementia Research Centre (DRCS), a part of the National Neuroscience Institute (NNI) Department of Neurology, Singapore, involved 818 participants, aged 30 and above, up from one in 20 as an “aged society,” and is set to form a close representation of the Singaporean population.

Among about 94 percent of them who were found to have had early-stage dementia, 60 percent of them were aged 65 and older.

According to the United Nations, the elderly population in Singapore is expected to grow from one in 10 in 2020 to one in five by 2050.

Although DRCS recruited about 20 percent of them who were diagnosed with dementia within the age range of 30 to 64 years, 40 percent of them were diagnosed with “late-onset” dementia, which typically occurs after age 65.

“Lifestyle is a contributing factor in dementia. The younger you are diagnosed when you are younger, the more susceptible to it,” said Dr. Kandiah, principal investigator of the study.

The team of scientists working at the DRCS, which is part of the Singapore National Neuroscience Institute (NNI), Department of Neurology, Singapore, was the first to study early-stage dementia outside China.

“Lifestyle is a contributing factor in dementia. The younger you are diagnosed when you are younger, the more susceptible to it,” said Dr. Kandiah, principal investigator of the study.

The study, conducted in Singapore, is expected to contribute significantly to the understanding of Asian dementia and to provide insights into potential preventive and therapeutic strategies.

The study findings are expected to help in the development of interventions to improve the quality of life for those with dementia and their caregivers.

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One of the biggest breakthroughs in the last two years are two drugs that show promise in halting the progression of dementia. A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2022 by the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) suggests these drugs are showing promising results.

These new drugs are part of a new wave of treatment development in dementia-focused therapeutics. They target the accumulation of amyloid and phosphorus in the brain, which are key factors in the development of Alzheimer's disease.

**Preventable Factors**

Preventing dementia is crucial and there are several factors that can help in reducing the risk of developing dementia:

1. **Physical Activity**: Regular exercise can help improve cognitive function and delay the onset of dementia.
2. **Healthy Diet**: A Mediterranean diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein can help reduce the risk of cognitive decline.
3. **Social Engagement**: Regular social interactions and activities can help maintain cognitive function.
4. **Sleep**: Adequate sleep is crucial for brain health and maintaining cognitive function.
5. **Cognitive Stimulation**: Engaging in mentally stimulating activities can reduce the risk of dementia.

**Clinical Trials**

The new drugs are currently undergoing clinical trials and are expected to be available in the near future. The FDA is reviewing the data and may approve these drugs in the coming months.

**Preventive Measures**

To prevent dementia, it is important to adopt a healthy lifestyle that includes regular physical activity, a balanced diet, regular social interactions, adequate sleep, and mental stimulation.

We have seen that we can get the patient to adopt a healthier lifestyle, we can control the worsening of the risk factors that lead to dementia.

**PREVENTION GUIDANCE**

**MEDITATION**

Phospholipids and cognitive function are crucial for brain health and brain function. Phospholipids are a type of fat that is found in cell membranes and is essential for cell function.

**Dementia Risk and Boost Brain Health**

There are ways for dementia, but death: maintaining regular contact with a dementia specialist such as someone who is also engaging in overall health, can help in reducing the risk of developing dementia.

**Healthy Eating**

A healthy diet that includes foods high in nutrients such as fish, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can help reduce the risk of dementia.

**Physical Activity**

Regular physical activity, such as walking or swimming, can help improve cognitive function and reduce the risk of dementia.

**Stress Reduction**

Reducing stress through activities such as meditation or yoga can help improve cognitive function and reduce the risk of dementia.

**Sleep**

A good night's sleep is crucial for brain health and maintaining cognitive function.

**Social Engagement**

Regular social interactions and activities can help maintain cognitive function and reduce the risk of dementia.

**Cognitive Stimulation**

Engaging in mentally stimulating activities can reduce the risk of dementia.