

Memory Loss Connection

Editor's Note—This is a new monthly column provided by the Big Stone County Memory Loss Connection Committee.

By Mary Ross

There is no “T” in Alzheimer’s

A few years ago I was struggling with spelling the word Alzheimer's and I asked my husband for help. His response? “There is no “t” in Alzheimer’s.” It helped me not only spell it correctly, but clarified for me something even more important.

Alzheimer’s disease is named for Dr. Alois Alzheimer who first identified the disease in 1906. Although he deserves much credit for his research, sometimes I wish his name had been Smith. Or Jones. Or something else more generic-sounding.

People, like me, who either struggle with spelling, or more often pronouncing his name, have fallen into the habit of calling this disease “all-timers” or even “old-timer’s” disease. I have even heard people who work for the Alzheimer’s Association occasionally use this vernacular.

So why is this a problem?

It is a problem because age does not cause Alzheimer's disease. It is a problem because it is not a normal part of aging. It is a problem because it is a disease of the brain. Although Alzheimer’s disease occurs more frequently as we age, aging is not causal. It is a disease, not just of memory, but of interference in judgement, language, and behavior. It is a disease that can affect people in their 40's or 50's, occasionally even people in their 30's.

Reducing Alzheimer’s disease to a condition only of the elderly reduces its devastating effects to a kind of sentimental “grandpa’s getting forgetful” status in many people’s minds.

Let's retire the “t” in Alzheimer’s. Let's tackle the disease for what it really is, an illness. An illness that needs research, understanding, and kindness.

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