Dementia With Lewy Bodies

Dementia with Lewy bodies is the second most frequent cause of dementia in elderly adults. It is a neurodegenerative disorder. This condition is associated with abnormal structures (Lewy bodies) found in certain areas of the brain. Because these structures and many of the symptoms of dementia with Lewy bodies are associated with Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, researchers do not yet understand whether dementia with Lewy bodies is a different disorder, or perhaps a variant of Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease. Recent research has revealed that Lewy bodies contain deposits of a protein called alpha-synuclein. This protein is also linked to Parkinson's disease and multiple system deterioration (*atrophy*). Symptoms can range from traditional Parkinsonian effects, such as:

- Loss of spontaneous movement *(bradykinesia)*.
- Muscles feel stiff and resist movement (*rigidity*).
- Tremor.
- Shuffling gait.

To effects similar to those of Alzheimer's disease such as:

- Sudden confusion.
- Loss of memory.
- Loss of, or fluctuating, awareness (*cognition*).

Visual hallucinations may be one of the first symptoms noted, and patients may suffer from other psychiatric disturbances such as delusions and depression. Starting symptoms of the disorder usually occurs in older adults, although younger people can be affected as well.

TREATMENT

Scientists continue to search for therapy for people with dementia with Lewy bodies. Treatment is symptomatic. Symptomatic treatment often involves the use of medication to control the Parkinsonian and psychiatric symptoms. Patients should be aware that anti-Parkinsonian medication that may help to reduce tremor and loss of muscle movement might actually worsen symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions. Similarly, neuroleptic drugs prescribed for psychiatric symptoms may in fact markedly worsen the movement symptoms. In general atypical anti-psychotic medications are more successful than older drugs such as haloperidol.

PROGNOSIS

Dementia with Lewy bodies is a slowly progressive condition for which there is no cure.

Research is continually being done to learn more about this problem.

Provided by: The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

Document Released: 09/09/2003 Document Re-Released: 03/16/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.