

Recognising the role of caregivers with the growing prevalence of Alzheimer's



By Leslie Morgan, OBE DL
CEO, Durbin PLC
Leslie Morgan is a Fellow of the Royal
Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

I'm amazed how our brains are able to hold memories with such detail that you could almost be transported back to a past time or place. It is easy to take for granted the vast amount of information our minds store, so when a security password or colleague's name temporarily slips my mind I find myself in a momentary panic. As we grow older these lapses in memory tend to worry us more. What will I do if one day I struggle to remember my own name or cannot recognise my loved ones? I am not alone, I imagine, in fearing age-associated conditions, such as Alzheimer's, especially as it can take away not just memories, but also one's independence, personality and dignity.

The population is ageing in the Middle East. And as people are living longer we have naturally seen an increase in neurodegenerative syndromes typical of old age, with a significant rise in the prevalence of Alzheimer's. However, although common in later years of life, Alzheimer's is not part of normal ageing. It is a complicated disease affecting parts of the brain that control thought, memory and language. Unfortunately, many countries in the Middle

East have very limited records and data regarding the number of people suffering with dementia. The World Health Organisation (WHO) says that they expect to see a 125% increase in cases of Alzheimer's in the Middle East by 2050.

Unfortunately, there is still a lack of understanding around what actually causes this condition. What we do know is that Alzheimer's is a neurodegenerative disease which forms abnormal structures within the brain known as plaques. This causes a breakdown of connections between nerve cells. Eventually, these cells die and the surrounding tissue shrinks. This can lead to a deterioration of memory, difficulty with language and changes in personality. Loss of body functions, such as incontinence; swallowing and walking are also typical at more advanced stages of the disease. Ultimately, it reaches a stage where the brain can no longer relay messages to keep the body functioning, eventually causing death. As with all illnesses, a great deal more can be done to slow the progress of Alzheimer's when it is diagnosed early, however the early stages can often be overlooked as a natural result of ageing.

Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) recognises that across the world it is generally the family and friends of those suffering with the disease who really form the cornerstone

of care and support. Traditionally in Arab culture, the onus of caring for the elderly falls to the family, but in the case of Alzheimer's this is often not ideal because as the disease progresses those suffering can find normal surroundings unsettling and too complicated to deal with. This places an enormous strain on carers. The 2015 World Alzheimer's report estimates that 94% of people living with dementia in low and middle income countries are cared for at home.

Current drug therapies are available to treat the symptoms of Alzheimer's, but there is as yet nothing that can stop or reverse the disease. There has however been a significant increase in investment worldwide in recent years to find cures for this and other forms of dementia. Clinical studies play a major part in investigating factors that could potentially cause the disease and also to trial new treatments. As expert suppliers in comparators to pharmaceutical companies, Durbin is aware of the huge costs and challenges that new drug development incurs. It is heartening to know therefore that governments are finally recognising Alzheimer's as a priority and are supporting ongoing research and development. It is equally important, however, that our governments recognise that funding the support of care givers should be a priority as well. MEH

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established for over 50 years, Durbin is a global specialist distributor operating in niche areas of pharmaceutical and medical distribution. Comprising of nine specialist divisions, Durbin prides itself on being a trusted global partner to healthcare manufacturers. The company is fully licensed by the UK MHRA, USA Pharmacy Authorities and DEA. Durbin has offices in the UK and in the USA and so can provide US, UK and European products directly from source.

- Web address: www.durbinglobal.com
- Email: bd@durbinglobal.com