

# Geriatric Medicine Changing due to Dementia Developments

Opinion

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## Abstract

It is becoming more and more common that older people with fractures, pneumonia, heart problems, non-alcohol-induced delirium and depressions, who are admitted to an acute hospital like the Asklepios Clinic Lindau at Lake Constance in Bavaria (Germany), are suffering from dementia changes at the same time. We show how the clinical manifestation of some dementia diseases may be averted or the onset could be significantly delayed. The author's opinion is inspired by the Nun Study of David A. Snowdon at al., that was a cohort of 678 participants, 75 to 107 years of age, followed longitudinally with up to ten cognitive assessments over a fifteen-year period.

**Keyword:** Older People, Very Elderly People, Multimorbidity, Dementia, Successful Aging

## Opinion

In Germany, around 1.8 million people suffer from dementia or from dementia-related symptoms. One in seven Germans will develop dementia in old age. Those affected lose abilities that the brain controls. For example, they can find it harder to orientate themselves, have speech problems and increasing memory gaps. Older and very elderly people with fractures, for example hip joint fractures, pneumonia, heart problems, or even non-alcohol-induced delirium and depressions, who are admitted to an acute hospital, therefore very often suffer from dementia-related changes. The epidemiological trend is just like it is currently in the department for acute geriatrics, which I built up at the Asklepios Clinic Lindau at Lake Constance (Bavaria) in the last 6 years. But many people only hope they do not. However, people can do something about it.

It is estimated that around half of all dementia cases could be "prevented", meaning at least the onset could be significantly delayed. There are essentially 13 main factors which determine how great the risk of developing dementia is. These risk factors for dementia amplify the risk of developing dementia in old age. This could be called an amplification effect. Risk factors that promote the development of dementia are: poor hearing, smoking, high blood pressure, being overweight at a younger age, little exercise, drinking a lot of alcohol, high blood sugar at a younger age, social isolation, high cholesterol levels at a younger age, low serum folate and zinc concentrations, low linguistic ability in early life, and untreated visual impairment.

There are 4 clinical phases of Alzheimer's dementia. The very early or prodromal stage corresponds to a mild cognitive impairment and mild behavioral impairment, especially of the spatial-visual performances. The early stage presents disorders especially of the short-term mem-

ory. In the middle stage, the long-term memory is now also affected. The late stage, also known as the final stage, is characterized by a progressive deterioration in health with significant eating and swallowing difficulties as well as an increased need for sleep and it also leads to death.

The picture of dementia, i.e. the medical perception of old and very elderly adults suffering from dementia, is currently changing in everyday clinical practice. The change is reflected in a change of the concept towards the discovery of the "person with dementia". This is about expanding medical perception. In everyday clinical practice, we move away from the classic definition of dementia as a syndrome that is usually caused by a chronic, advanced brain disease with disruption of many higher cognitive functions without clouding of consciousness. The change can be described as moving away from 'zombification' (de-mentia in Latin means without mind) with the loss of self, the disappearance of the ego and the tragedy of dementia towards emotion-based and need-oriented perception and medical care. Person-centered care in an acute hospital means: giving comfort, creating secure bonds, meeting the need for social participation, promoting a strong sense of identity for old and very elderly people with dementia and no longer focusing on the neurobiological disease, but on the person themselves. Clinical experience also shows that music is the direct path to the soul and contributes to the well-being of old and very elderly people.

The three important factors for 'preventing' dementia or rather delaying dementia are social interaction, a constantly continued learning process for cognition and physical activity. Conversation and company are extremely important for the brain and if patients have fun, all the better.



The author's opinion is inspired by the Nun Study of David A. Snowdon et al. from the University of Kentucky, Lexington, USA [1-8]. The Nun Study is a longitudinal study of 678 Catholic sisters aged 75 to 107 years who are members of the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in North America (USA) and were followed over 15 years.

## Conflict of Interest

The author does not have any copyright issues or conflict of interest.

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