

International survey highlights great public desire to seek early diagnosis of Alzheimer's

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Results of an international survey reveal that over 85% of respondents in the five countries surveyed say that if they were exhibiting confusion and memory loss, they would want to see a doctor to determine if the cause of the symptoms was Alzheimer's disease. Over 94% would want the same if a family member were exhibiting the symptoms. The findings were presented today at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference 2011 (AAIC 2011).

The survey of the U.S. and four [European countries](#) – France, Germany, Spain and Poland – was designed and analysed by Alzheimer Europe and the Harvard School of Public Health.

In four of the five countries, Alzheimer's disease was the second biggest health fear after cancer. The public were asked to choose which disease they were most afraid of getting from a list of seven diseases including cancer, heart disease and stroke. Around a quarter of adults in four of the five countries say they most fear getting Alzheimer's disease.

Fear of Alzheimer's gets worse with age, but even young adults are concerned, with approximately one in seven 18- to 34-year-olds reporting Alzheimer's as the disease they are most afraid of getting from the list provided.

The survey found a large proportion of the public has had some experience with Alzheimer's disease. Majorities in all five countries say that they know or have known someone with Alzheimer's disease,

including about seven in ten in France (72%), Germany (73%), Spain (77%), and in the U.S. (73%), and 54% in Poland. In addition, about three in ten have personal experience with a family member with Alzheimer's disease. Experience with a family member ranges from 19% in Poland to 42% in the U.S.

This high level of contact with Alzheimer's disease is likely to have contributed to the wide recognition of common symptoms such as confusion and getting lost, which were recognised by at least 86% and 88%, respectively.

Few people recognised the severity of Alzheimer's disease with approximately 40% knowing that it is a fatal condition (33-61%). In fact, Alzheimer's is the seventh-leading cause of death in high income countries and the only cause of death among the top 10 that cannot be prevented or cured.[ii]

Many of the [respondents](#) believe there is now an effective medical or pharmaceutical treatment to slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease and make the symptoms less severe (27%-63%). Also, nearly half believe there is a reliable medical test to determine if a person suffering from confusion and [memory loss](#) is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease (38%-59%).

The survey also found public interest in predictive testing. Approximately two thirds of respondents said that, they would get a medical test which would tell them whether they would get Alzheimer's disease before they had symptoms.

Heike von Lützu-Hohlbein, Chairperson of Alzheimer Europe, said: "The results demonstrate the importance of being honest with patients when diagnosing [Alzheimer's disease](#). As a former carer myself, I recognise how valuable it is for people to have first-of-all a name for all

the uncertainties of their condition and then have the time to get their affairs in order. It will always be difficult to receive such a diagnosis but doctors need to empower patients and their loved ones to take the appropriate steps. The findings also show there is high awareness of Alzheimer's [disease](#), which is a testament to the success of the many awareness campaigns coordinated by Alzheimer societies."

Dr. Robert Blendon, Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis from the Harvard School of Public Health said: "Many of the public have high expectations about the possibilities of treatment alternatives and medical testing. It is important for doctors to talk to patients about what treatment and testing options are or are not available."

Florence Lustman, Coordinator of the French Alzheimer Plan, said: "Alzheimer's is a fatal condition that affects most people's lives at some time. One of the key priorities of the French Alzheimer's Plan is early diagnosis, and the survey results support this focus. The findings demonstrate overwhelming public support for receiving diagnosis."

Provided by Harvard School of Public Health

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