

Researchers find cataract surgery slows dementia for Alzheimer's patients

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Cataract surgery on Alzheimer's disease patients slows dementia and improves their quality of life, according to clinical trials conducted by researchers at Case Western Reserve University, University Hospitals Case Medical Center and MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland.

The preliminary findings are the result of a five-year study funded by the National Institute on Aging that examined the benefits of cataract surgery for people with Alzheimer's disease.

The promising results were presented recently at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference 2014 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Grover "Cleve" Gilmore, PhD, Dean of the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve, led the study. Alan Lerner, MD, from Case Western Reserve's medical school and University Hospitals Case Medical Center, described the study's outcomes at the conference.

Gilmore said he hopes the study's outcomes change the health disparity for Alzheimer's patients denied cataract surgery due to a lack of evidence of any benefit.

"We've shown that it does benefit them," he said.

The researchers report that, after assessing risks and safety issues for Alzheimer's patients, co-occurring health problems—like

cataracts—should be addressed.

"This study supports the Alzheimer's Association view that people with dementia retain, and benefit from, full health care treatment," said Maria Carrillo, PhD, the association's vice president of medical and science relations.

Common perceptions that Alzheimer's patients need no extra care or shouldn't be put through surgery "are not justified and are bad medical practice," Carrillo said.

Gilmore's psychological research in visual perception deficits has shown that blurred vision and problems with contrast, which can occur with aging and dementia, place many at risk for accidents, such as bumping into things and falling down stairs. And as their visual world disappears, he said, many become withdrawn.

The study's co-investigators are: Lerner and Jon Lass, from Case Western Reserve's Department of Ophthalmology at the medical school and University Hospitals Case Medical Center (UH); Julie Belkin and Susie Sami, from UH; Tatiana Riedel from Case Western Reserve's Department of Psychological Sciences and Sara Debanne from the Department of Epidemiology; and Thomas Steinemann, from Case Western Reserve and MetroHealth Medical Center.

The study's participants were recruited from UH and MetroHealth. There were 28 Alzheimer's patients who had [cataract surgery](#) and 14 who did not. The group that had the surgery reported not only clearer vision, but that their cognitive abilities were maintained or improved as the brain worked to process and interpret information the individual can now see.

The patients weren't the only ones to benefit from the surgery. Gilmore

said caregivers reported being less stressed because the surgery allowed Alzheimer's [patients](#) to become more mobile and independent—getting dressed, eating, moving and even driving.

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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