

AAN recommends people 65+ be screened yearly for memory problems

September 18 2019



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People with mild cognitive impairment have thinking and memory problems but usually do not know it because such problems are not severe enough to affect their daily activities. Yet mild cognitive impairment can be an early sign of Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. It can also be a symptom of sleep problems, medical illness, depression, or a side effect of medications.

To help physicians provide the highest quality patient-centered neurologic care, the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) is recommending physicians measure how frequently they complete annual assessments of people age 65 and older for thinking and [memory problems](#). This metric for yearly cognitive screening tests is part of an AAN quality measurement set published in the September 18, 2019, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

A quality measure is a mathematical tool to help physicians and practices understand how often [health care services](#) are consistent with current best practices and are based on existing AAN guideline recommendations. Quality measures are intended to drive quality improvement in practice. Physicians are encouraged to start small using one or two quality measures in practice that are meaningful for their patient population, and measure use is voluntary.

"Since thinking skills are the most sensitive indicator of brain function and they can be tested cost-effectively, this creates an enormous opportunity to improve neurologic care," said author Norman L. Foster, MD, of the University of Utah in Salt Lake City and a Fellow of the American Academy of Neurology. "The American Academy of Neurology is recommending the measurement of annual cognitive screenings for everyone age 65 and older because age itself is a significant risk factor for [cognitive decline](#) and [mild cognitive impairment](#) is increasingly prevalent with older age. The measure complements past American Academy of Neurology [quality measures](#) released for Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and stroke, and allows for a doctor to meet the measure with a recommended periodic three-minute cognitive test."

According to the 2018 AAN guideline on mild cognitive impairment, nearly 7 percent of people in their early 60s worldwide have mild

cognitive impairment, while 38 percent of people age 85 and older have it.

The new AAN quality measurement set recommends doctors measure how often they conduct annual screenings to improve the recognition of mild cognitive impairment and allow for earlier intervention.

"We cannot expect people to report their own memory and thinking problems because they may not recognize that they are having problems or they may not share them with their doctors," said Foster. "Annual assessments will not only help identify mild cognitive impairment early, it will also help physicians more closely monitor possible worsening of the condition."

The new measurement set states that documenting mild cognitive impairment in a person's medical record can be invaluable in alerting other physicians and medical staff so that the best care is provided to that patient.

Early diagnosis can help identify forms of mild cognitive impairment that may be reversible, including those caused by sleep problems, depression or medications, and lead to treatments that can improve a person's quality of life such as correcting hearing loss and avoiding social isolation.

When mild cognitive impairment is not reversible and could develop into more severe forms of dementia like Alzheimer's disease, the quality measurement set recommends measuring how frequently people are given information about their condition as early as possible, so they can take steps to avoid exploitation, plan for their care and monitor their condition.

It is also important not to forget about family and caregivers. The

measurement set also asks doctors to identify care partners to help describe symptoms. Doctors should quantify involvement with family and caregivers and provide them with information so that they too receive support and get access to services to help them cope if person's illness progresses and to improve their well-being.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

Citation: AAN recommends people 65+ be screened yearly for memory problems (2019, September 18) retrieved 17 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-09-aan-people-screened-yearly-memory.html>

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