



## DIAGNOSIS FACT SHEET

*Services and guidance that physicians may offer to those with Alzheimer's Disease, and their families*

### Evaluation and Diagnosis

- The physician needs a history from family member (s) about changes over time in the patient's personality, memory, mental functioning speech and language problems, good days and bad days. A journal is especially helpful to the physician.
- Several visits may be necessary if the patient tires easily and if different family members are available to offer their various views.
- Follow-up visits track the progression of the patient's condition over time.
- The initial diagnosis might be "dementia" until the physician is able to see the patient's progress over time and be fairly sure whether it is "Alzheimer's."

**These laboratory tests** can help exclude other disorders, which may look like Alzheimer's:

Complete Blood Count	Thyroid functions	HIV – AIDS test
B12 and folic acid levels	Syphilis blood test	Electrolytes
Serum Calcium	Kidney and liver function	CT brain scan
Chest X-Ray	Medication levels	EKG
Sedimentation Rate – a test for inflammatory conditions such as Lupus		

**Detailed testing by a psychologist** with puzzles, games and questionnaires measures brain function and changes over time, and helps distinguish between dementia and benign forgetfulness.



## **Care of the Alzheimer's Patient and the Alzheimer's Family**

### **The physician should be able to:**

- Give attention to associated problems, which may be treated, such as depression, Parkinson's, alcohol or drug abuse, nutritional problems, dehydration, strokes, bedsores, falls.
- Discuss methods of communication.
- Offer suggestions about management of behavioral problems (wandering, aggression, hiding things, paranoia, etc.)
- Suggest changes/modifications to structure of living quarters (simplify, organize, label) and regular schedule for daily activities (eating, sleeping, exercise, medicine).
- Refer families to community resources (support groups, day care respite care, companions, meals, transport).
- Refer families to legal and financial information (guardianship, durable power of attorney, and long term care insurance).
- Assist with the nursing home decision.

Prepared in collaboration with Leslie Bryant, MD, 3/90, revised 5/96, 3/00