

# State support missing for rising number of alzheimer's patients

**CARE FACILITIES** A day-care centre in Delhi shows the way, families need training too

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**NEW DELHI:** The world will mark the fifth alzheimer's awareness month in September but state support for dementia patients, under which the disease falls, is dismal. Targeted awareness programmes for families are missing.

One in eight Indians will suffer from dementia and alzheimer's disease in the next 14 years, as per a report, but care facilities for them are inadequate.

A small day-care centre in Tughlakabad Extension, however, is defying all odds to make sure its 10 patients and their families have help.

The centre, run by the Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India (ARSDI), is the only centre of its kind for alzheimer's patients in Delhi.

Patients at the centre are picked up from across the city early in the morning and reach the facility at 10 am. They begin their schedule of exercises, drawing and colouring and find time for a nap in between.

"We receive 3-4 calls from families of Alzheimer's disease patients every day. Of these, 40% need a follow-up. We do home visits and counsel people," said R Narendhar, director, ARSDI.

The facility is a boon for people who can't take care of patients, usually their parents, during the day.

"One of our regular patients is a former teacher from Delhi University. She comes to the office often and asks for her salary cheque. She also gives leaves of application. She doesn't remember much, only that she taught in a college," said Narendhar.

The facility, he says, can be used as a prototype by the government to start its own facilities, as the case in Kerala, but there are



Alzheimer's patients receive care at the Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India in Delhi. The centre, situated in Tughlakabad Extension, receives 3-4 calls from the patients every day. **RAJ K RAJ/HT**

no chances of that happening yet.

The Delhi government will open five halfway homes for mentally ill patients later this year. There is no mention, however, of any facility for dementia and alzheimer's patients nor are there any facilities.

In 2009, the government had planned a day-care centre for alzheimer's patients but it was not built. The Delhi government health secretary says there are no plans to open one anytime soon.

The scale of the problem though, should prompt the government to action.

There are 4.1 million dementia patients in India, according to Dementia India report, which was published in 2010. Of these, only 10% are diagnosed, says the report. In contrast, there are 2.3 million HIV patients and 1.8 million cancer patients in the country.

"When my mother started

showing signs of alzheimer's, I chalked it up to old-age. She progressively got worse and even when we realised she had alzheimer's, we had no idea whom to turn to," says Seema Singh, 55, a government employee who is on leave from office for the past year. Her mother is in the last stage of alzheimer's.

The only help is in the form of a handful of private and society-run centres for dementia patients.

"In Delhi alone, there are at least 42,000 dementia patients. It is a medical and social problem, one that falls under the health and social welfare department. In Kerala, the government has understood the scale and urgency of the problem and has started day-care and chronic-care centres for alzheimer's patients," he said.

With a growing population of elderly, doctors say we have a

situation on our hands that we are not prepared for.

According to Census 2011, there are 1,147,000 people above the age of 60 in Delhi. This is about 7% of the total population.

The old-age dependency ratio – the number of people out of the workforce dependent on people in the workforce – is 10.4%.

"The burden of an alzheimer's patient is equivalent to that of three sick people," said Dr Manjari Tripathi, neurology department, All India institute of Medical Sciences.

"It is an irreversible disease and its likelihood increases with age. As the population is living longer, the incidence of the disease is also increasing. We need a robust social security net like in the west, at least for taxpayers. How we treat them is a reflection of who we are. We barely have any facilities for them," Dr Tripathi said.