

CORRESPONDENCE

Raising awareness of preventive strategies for dementia in relatives

Purandare *et al* (2005) have clearly pointed out the various modifiable risk factors for dementia. Their well-timed article provides an excellent overview of the various studies to date that have been associated with reducing the risk of the disease.

The prevalence of dementia is expected to increase considerably over the next 20 years, and the first-degree relatives of someone with dementia are at increased risk of developing the disease. I therefore wish to draw attention to the importance of increasing the awareness of the illness among family members.

I conduct memory clinics and on numerous occasions family members of patients have approached me, apprehensive about their own risk of dementia. I wonder how many of us make use of the opportunity in clinics to provide information leaflets, discuss risk factors and inform relatives of measures that can be taken to minimise their risk. However small that risk may be, the opportunity to educate about healthy lifestyle options and risk factor reduction should not be lost.

Vascular risk factors are associated not only with vascular dementia but also with Alzheimer's dementia (Stewart *et al*, 1998), which together account for the lion's share of all dementias. There has been considerable evidence to show that by reducing these risk factors, dementia can be delayed, or even avoided. The general importance of vascular health is already frequently reinforced by medical staff and the media. However, educating relatives of people with dementia specifically on vascular risk factors for the disease and also on the importance of neuro-protection and building up neuronal reserves will further help families to be proactive in preventing dementia and may also make it easier for them to cope with their current situation.

Mayeux, R., Sano, M., Chen, J., *et al* (1991) Risk of dementia in first-degree relatives of patients with Alzheimers and related disorders. *Archives of Neurology*, **48**, 269–273.

Purandare, N., Ballard, C. & Burns, A. (2005) Preventing dementia. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, **11**, 176–183.

Stewart, R. (1998) Cardiovascular risk factors in Alzheimer's disease. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*, **65**, 143–147.

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