

*I think with all the "Alzheimer" diagnoses out there, this is a "must read" to many of us. After all, 15% is a lot of percentage - when it is oneself that is afflicted. I realize that **some of you** already read it, or glanced at it, but this story may have **impact for others** in your life, both here and far away, and may - just may - give another option for diagnoses that are difficult to arrive at. I had heard about this man before, but to read the write-up prompted me to want to send it on, in case some of you have puzzling cases within your family or circle of friends. We pass around so many jokes and such - THIS may save someones constructive life. Margaret*

Alzheimers or NPH

By CAROLINE KLAPPER, DAILY SUN, THE VILLAGES, FI

Three years ago, Del Lasley of the Village of Alhambra barely could walk. He had trouble getting out of chairs, and he began to have memory problems.

"My wife held my shirt when I walked, so I didn't tip over," Lasley said.

Visits to the doctor didn't give him any clear answers or any kind of definitive diagnosis for his symptoms, although an MRI did reveal that the ventricles in his brain were enlarged. Without even having a name for his debilitating condition, Lasley was told he probably would end up in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Finding a diagnosis

Instead of accepting his prognosis, Lasley turned to Dr. Khai Chang, of Lakeview Internal Medicine in Summerfield, for answers. After listening to Lasley's symptoms, Chang tested him for a condition called Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus, or NPH.

NPH is a neurological condition in which there is an accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid in the three ventricles in the brain. The fluid buildup causes the ventricles to enlarge and put excessive pressure on the surrounding brain cells.

NPH occurs mostly in adults age 50 or older. The most common symptoms of NPH are shuffling feet, loss of lower body strength, dizziness and loss of balance, short-term memory loss and incontinence.

NPH symptoms are similar to those of Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, and because of that, patients **often are misdiagnosed**. (*Red lettered by me. M*)

"Fifteen percent of patients diagnosed as having dementia or Alzheimer's actually have Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus," Chang said.

Although the condition is not common, Chang had diagnosed several patients before Lasley and was very familiar with NPH symptoms.

"I just never got a complete diagnosis until going to Dr. Chang," Lasley said. "He's the one that nailed it for me and turned my life around."

Getting his life back

Fortunately, there is a treatment for NPH involving the placement of a shunt, a device that drains the excess fluid from the brain and into the abdomen, where it is harmlessly absorbed back into the body. Lasley had a shunt implanted and the results were amazing.

"It was a 40-minute surgery, and that turned my life around," he said. "The shunt in my head has worked almost 100 percent. In little to no time, I started back with normal activities."

Not only can Lasley walk normally again, but he also was able to resume his favorite hobbies of golfing and bowling several times a week. Before getting treated, Lasley was so afraid of falling that he had to make sure he picked up his newspaper while facing away from the road to avoid falling into the street.

"Now I very deliberately face the street to pick up my paper. That's my test every day that it's still working," he said. "It was like starting life all over again."

If left untreated, NPH can cause increased symptoms and even brain damage, so Lasley said he knows how lucky he was **to get treatment before it was too late**. (Red lettered by me. M.)

Chang said of those patients who go undiagnosed, many end up in nursing homes because of their worsening condition. "The problem is, if you don't look for it, you're not going to find it," he said. "Not enough doctors look for it."

For that reason, Lasley said he wants to raise awareness about NPH and encourage others to be aware of the condition. He said people experiencing possible NPH symptoms shouldn't be afraid to ask their doctors about it. And, he added, anyone who feels like their doctor isn't listening to their concerns should get a second opinion.

"When you go to get work done on your car, you get two or three estimates. Why would you only get one estimate on your own body?" he said. "I've been there, and it scares the heck out of you because you don't know what's wrong. You've got to find out what's wrong with you."

For information about NPH, visit the Life NPH Web site at lifeph.com. To schedule Del Lasley to speak to your group about NPH, call him at 750-2755.

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