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Immediate Release

HKSH Survey: 80% Opined Lack of Alzheimer's Understanding Delays Treatment Highlighting Need of Timely Detection in Preclinical Stage to Alleviate Burden on Patients and Caregivers

(17 December 2025, Hong Kong) With an ageing population, dementia, which is closely linked to age, is becoming increasingly common in Hong Kong. Data show¹ that the prevalence rate is 1.1% for people aged 60-64, soaring to 49.8% by age 85. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia. However, according to the World Health Organization, it remains underdiagnosed and most patients are diagnosed at a later stage. Due to the severity and irreversible nature of the disease, it places a heavy physical and mental burden on patients and caregivers.

To understand Hong Kong citizens' awareness and attitudes towards Alzheimer's disease, HKSH Medical Group (HKSH) conducted an online survey between September and October 2025, attracting 786 respondents to share their views. The results indicated three major misconceptions about Alzheimer's disease, which could lead patients to miss the opportunity for timely diagnosis and intervention. Nearly 40% of respondents believed that Alzheimer's disease is simply a part of normal ageing. Over 30% thought that there is no treatment, and nearly 80% attributed delayed medical attention to a lack of understanding of Alzheimer's disease. The apparent lack of knowledge about Alzheimer's disease presents a call for concerns about under-diagnosis.

Dr Joseph CHAN, Chief Medical Officer of HKSH Medical Group and Deputy Medical Superintendent of Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital, said, "Alzheimer's disease is a condition that often instills fear in people, but we believe that a correct understanding of the disease is the first step in addressing it. In August this year, HKSH launched the Alzheimer's Awareness and Screening Programme to raise public awareness and help both doctors and patients understand the risks and progression of Alzheimer's disease. Since programme launch, over half of the participants have been tested positive and require follow-up action. With the continuous advancement of clinical research, HKSH now offers a one-stop management service for Alzheimer's disease, including blood test screening, dual-tracer PET scan, as well as personalised treatment plans and follow-up care."

Misconception 1: Is Alzheimer's disease inevitable with ageing?

Respondents of the survey showed diverse opinions on whether Alzheimer's disease is a normal part of ageing, with 39.1% agreeing and strongly agreeing, while 38.9% disagreed and strongly disagreed, illustrating a certain level of misunderstanding. **Dr. LI Chung Ki, Patrick, Co-Director of HKSH Neurology Centre and Specialist in Neurology**, said, "Alzheimer's disease is not a normal process of ageing, it is an irreversible brain disorder caused by excess accumulation of amyloid and tau proteins in the brain. Amyloid proteins can accumulate 10 to 20 years prior to the onset of symptoms, creating plaques that impede the brain's nerve cell function. Patients will experience continuous decline in cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physical functions, from initial forgetfulness and mood swings to severe deterioration where they can no longer recognise family members, experience incontinence, exhibit abnormal behaviors, and anxiety. This not only leads to a gradual loss of self-care ability but also places an increasingly heavy burden on caregivers. Thus, the key to fighting Alzheimer's lies in early detection as well as timely intervention and treatment."

Misconception 2: It is difficult to detect Alzheimer's disease early

The World Health Organization points out that dementia, including Alzheimer's disease is underdiagnosed globally, and even when diagnosed, it is often at a later stage. The HKSH survey also explored reasons for delayed medical

¹ Lam LCW et al. The Hong Kong Mental Morbidity Survey for Older People – HKMMSOP. Submitted to the Grant Review Board on 4 December 2023 Final Report (Version 2). <https://rfs2.healthbureau.gov.hk/search/#/fundedsearch/projectdetail?id=2444&lang=en>

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attention, finding that 77% of respondents believe a lack of understanding about Alzheimer's disease is the main reason for such delays. Other reasons include perceiving age-related cognitive decline as normal (59%) and difficulty noticing symptoms (55%), both of which are linked to insufficient disease awareness, leading to missed treatment opportunities.

As we age, forgetfulness, repeated questioning, and slowed reactions can easily be confused with general age-related memory loss. However, **Dr. SHIU Ka Lock, Specialist in Neurology at HKSH**, pointed out, "Age-related decline and Alzheimer's disease are different. It is important to note that while the patient's cognitive function may still be largely normal during the Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) stage caused by early-stage Alzheimer's disease, abnormal proteins accumulation is already present in the brain. Therefore, precise and non-invasive testing methods are crucial to accurately identify the condition."

Current testing methods can avoid the risks associated with traditional invasive cerebrospinal fluid tests. Through a simple blood test, the level of p-Tau 217 in the plasma can be measured. When this biomarker exceeds a specific level, it indicates a potential risk of Alzheimer's disease. Once diagnosed, doctors can arrange for patients to undergo highly sensitive and specific dual-tracer PET scan which can detect amyloid and tau proteins even in the early or asymptomatic stages of the disease. This enables more targeted treatment strategies to delay the brain damage caused by Alzheimer's progression. In addition to diagnosis, testing can also assess an individual's genetic risk for Alzheimer's disease, including blood tests for APOE gene variants. For instance, individuals with two E4 alleles in their genetic makeup may have a risk of developing Alzheimer's that is up to ten times higher. This testing can also help evaluate the risk of side effects for patients undergoing disease modifying treatments.

Misconception 3: Is Alzheimer's disease untreatable?

The survey also revealed that respondents harbor certain doubts regarding current treatments for Alzheimer's disease, with 34% believing there is no treatment, and 23.3% attributing delays in seeking medical care to the belief that Alzheimer's is untreatable. In fact, traditional therapies for Alzheimer's disease include both pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches, but primarily aimed at symptom relief. Traditional medications can only enhance the function of remaining brain cells by supplementing neurotransmitters, but the brain cells and synapses of patients continue to decline and cannot be restored.

Dr. TSOI Tak Hong, Co-Director of HKSH Neurology Centre and Specialist in Neurology, stated, "Two types of innovative disease-modifying therapy recently approved in Hong Kong target the pathology directly at its source by eliminating amyloid proteins in the brain, preventing further damage to brain cells. This approach effectively addresses the root cause and slows the progression of early-stage Alzheimer's disease and cognitive decline."

Taking one of the disease-modifying therapies, Lecanemab, as an example, research data published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* shows that compared to the placebo cohort, those treated with Lecanemab experienced clearance of accumulated plaques after 18 months of treatment, delaying cognitive and functional decline by 27%. Currently, there are multiple drug options available for disease-modifying therapy. When combined with non-pharmacological treatments such as multi-sensory therapy and reminiscence therapy, this approach can effectively improve the condition.

Protecting brain health and preventing Alzheimer's disease

The best way to manage Alzheimer's disease is prevention. **Dr. NG Ping Wing, Specialist in Neurology at HKSH**, said, "Alzheimer's is a preventable brain disease. International medical journal *The Lancet* updated in 2024 the 14 modifiable risk factors for preventing or delaying dementia, including newly added factors like high LDL cholesterol and hearing impairment. Avoiding these two risk factors could reduce the chance of developing dementia by 7% each

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while avoiding social isolation, depression and traumatic brain injury could also reduce the risk by 3% to 5%." The report also indicates that modulating these 14 modifiable risk factors could prevent or delay nearly half of global dementia cases, urging the public to start with daily life to reduce the risk of brain degeneration.²

Breaking family taboos with mutual understanding and communications

Facing declining cognitive ability is a challenge for the entire family. The survey found that when parents or family members show signs of memory or cognitive problems, 38% would not immediately or actively encourage them to undergo screening. In addition to concerns that a diagnosis would bring them significant psychological stress and fear (46%), the other two main reasons were related to familial taboos: worrying the patient would feel offended or criticised (48%), and not knowing how to broach this sensitive topic (28%).

Dr. LEUNG Man Fuk, Edward, Director of HKSH Geriatric Medicine Centre and Specialist in Geriatric Medicine, stated, "It is not uncommon for Alzheimer's disease to be stigmatised in clinical practice, leading many patients to seek medical attention only when they are already in the middle or late stages of the disease. Compared to early intervention, treatment at this stage becomes more complex, causing immense pressure on family members as primary caregivers. If caregivers frequently feel lonely, sad, or lost, they should regularly take breaks from their caregiving responsibilities. When the required level of care becomes overwhelming, considering institutional care services should be an option. If a family member is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, it is important to keep them company in daily life and throughout treatment. Any observed abnormalities should not be concealed, as this could lead to more severe degenerative symptoms and greater caregiving pressure."

Although Alzheimer's disease is irreversible, early detection and treatment can still enable patients to enjoy healthy and fulfilling golden years. **Dr. Joseph CHAN** concluded, "Family medicine and primary healthcare serve as critical touchpoints for the diagnosis and treatment of Alzheimer's disease, and they are also the essential first step toward personalised care. For early-stage brain changes, genetic diagnosis can now be performed through blood tests. In terms of treatment, growing evidence suggests that new targeted disease-modifying therapies may help delay disease progression. Early detection and treatment are key to alleviating the burden on both patients and their families."

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About HKSH Medical Group

Officially launched in September 2017, HKSH Medical Group promotes public health and advanced medicine through a multi-faceted, coordinated approach across clinical services, medical education, scientific research and public health education. Members of the Group, including Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital, HKSH Healthcare, HKSH Eastern Medical Centre and HKSH Cancer Centre, are dedicated to offering top-quality holistic care to patients.

² Livingston, Gill et al. Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2024 report of the Lancet standing Commission. The Lancet, Volume 404, Issue 10452, 572 - 628. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(24\)01296-0/abstract](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)01296-0/abstract)

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Established in 1922, Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital is one of the key members of HKSH Medical Group and a leading private hospital in Hong Kong. Living up to its motto of 'Quality in Service, Excellence in Care', the Hospital is committed to serving the public as well as promoting medical education and research.

For more information about HKSH Medical Group, please visit <http://www.hksh.com>.

Photo caption:



The HKSH Alzheimer's Disease Survey revealed that nearly 80% of respondents attribute delayed medical attention to a lack of understanding of Alzheimer's disease. **Dr Joseph CHAN, Chief Medical Officer of HKSH Medical Group and Deputy Medical Superintendent of Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital, Co-Director of HKSH Neurology Centre Dr. TSOI Tak Hong and Dr. LI Chung Ki, Patrick** along with **Specialist in Neurology Dr. NG Ping Wing and Dr. SHIU Ka Lock** reminded the public that Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of ageing. Early intervention can effectively delay cognitive decline and alleviate the burden on both patients and caregivers.

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