

# TECH HELP TO DEAL WITH DEMENTIA

PRESSURE SWITCHES, PILL DISPENSERS TO ASSIST THE ELDERLY

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**D**ementia can be a stressful experience for patients and their families, but technology can make life easier and safer, say experts.

That is some solace against the bleak picture the World Health Organisation recently drew with its report 'Dementia – a public health priority.' India has 3.7 million people with dementia, the report said, and the numbers are set to double in 20 years.

Dr Ennappadam S Krishnamoorthy, director, Institute of Neurological Sciences at the VHS Hospital, was one of the four global project leaders working on the report. He said the growing trend of families leading a nuclear existence will make management of dementia tougher. Caregivers in rural India are largely children or their spouses, 70% of them to be precise, while in urban areas they constitute only 40% of caregivers. However, spouses as caregivers are more in urban areas (27%) than rural areas (23%).

"As years go by, the elderly are likely to be more lonely. More and more people are moving into nuclear families. The elderly living alone will require constant support. For instance, something like a programmed reminder on mobile phones will help. Since most people in India have mobiles, it can be cost-effective. In Europe, there are facilities that make the life of dementia patients simple," he said.

For instance, there are pressure switches that turn lights on when you sit down, pill dispensers with recorded message on dining table that remind patients of after-food medication and LED based lights that remind you to take the keys when you lock the door.

There are nearly 35.6 million people living with dementia worldwide. This number is expected to double by 2030 (65.7 million) and more than triple by 2050 (115.4 million). There are 7.7 million new cases of dementia each year — a new case is being detected somewhere in the world every four seconds.

Healthcare experts fear that in developing countries like India and China, where incidence of lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and hypertension is high, dementia cases could go up considerably because of vascular problems.

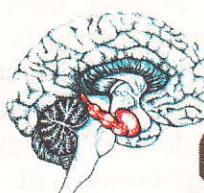
For long, healthcare experts have been demanding national guidelines for management of Alzheimer's.

Geriatrician Dr V S Natarajan recommends use of simple diagnostic tools that can detect the illness early. "There are standard simple easy-to-use tools. If we detect them early, we can manage them better," he said.

Though there aren't enough professional care centres in India, several institutions train caregivers. "We may soon need professional caregivers. We could train people under the rural employment guarantee scheme. They would help in better management of these people. If we don't create the necessary human resources, hospitals will soon be burdened and the cost of treatment will go up," said Dr Krishnamoorthy.

## LOSING TRACK OF ONE'S MIND

**ABOUT 3.7 MILLION PEOPLE IN INDIA SUFFER FROM DEMENTIA, ACCORDING TO A WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION REPORT, AND THESE NUMBERS ARE SET TO DOUBLE IN 20 YEARS**



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► **7.7** million new cases of dementia are being recorded each year

► A new case of dementia is being detected every four seconds in the world

(Source: Dementia: A Public Health Priority, WHO)

URBAN AREAS SEEM WORSE OFF THAN RURAL AREAS WHEN IT COMES TO SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR DEMENTIA PATIENTS



## TECH TALK

FOLLOWING ARE THE TECHNOLOGIES USED IN DEMENTIA MANAGEMENT

► Telephones and videophones are used for counselling for patients and caregivers



► Internet-based information services that will help motivate caregivers

► Alarm sensors to help prevent dementia patients from wandering

► Sensors to turn off gas or stove

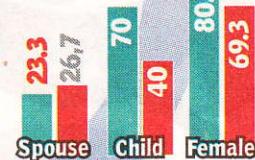
► Pill dispensers that tweet, email or alert through voice messages

► LED lights that remind patients to take keys after locking the house

If we detect the illness early, we can manage them better

Dr V S Natarajan  
GERIATRICIAN

## SUPPORT SYSTEM



Figures in %

● Rural ● Urban