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**SCHOOL OF MEDICINE OFFERS NEW THERAPIES
FOR ALZHEIMER'S AND PARKINSON'S PATIENTS**

Becoming afflicted with a disease that destroys memory or impairs mobility, is a looming fear for many people – particularly the elderly.

This concern is not unfounded, according to Charles Bernick, M.D., chief of neurology at the University of Nevada School of Medicine, since it is estimated that 10% of people over age 65, and 50% of those over 85 have Alzheimer's Disease. Parkinson's Disease, which results in difficulties with movement and muscular function, is also more common in the elderly, he says.

Where treatment options were once limited, the past five years has seen a tremendous explosion of medications now available or in development, to treat these patients. New therapies are most effective when instituted as early as possible in the course of the disease, Dr. Bernick explains, therefore, early and accurate diagnosis is critical. Recognizing that a problem exists is often difficult for the patient or family members, since slowness, shuffling while walking, difficulty initiating movements, and tiredness – symptoms of Parkinson's Disease -- are often attributed to being part of the normal aging process or arthritis.

Society also accepts a certain degree of memory loss; families and caregivers often delay seeking medical attention until drastic mental changes occur. "In reality," Dr. Bernick says, "any

time the appearance of memory impairment affects daily function, a prompt and thorough evaluation should take place to determine its cause." Other conditions that mimic Alzheimer's symptoms of mental decline include strokes, depression, vitamin deficiencies and drugs.

The primary strategy for treating Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease involves replacing chemicals that are deficient in the brain; acetylcholine in Alzheimer's, and dopamine in Parkinson's. In addition, agents that may slow the progression of these diseases are being explored.

"There is evidence that certain medications may retard the progress of Parkinsons, and delay decline in Alzheimer's" Dr. Bernick says. The School of Medicine is currently looking at estrogen replacement and anti-inflammatory drugs to treat Alzheimer's.

In step with new advances in managing Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, the School of Medicine has a consortium of specialty programs addressing common neurological problems of aging. These include the newly opened APDA Parkinson's Disease Information and Referral Center, the Alzheimer's Disease Diagnostic and Treatment Center, and the Comprehensive Neuromuscular Disorders Center.

"We believe our programs offer the Las Vegas community the most up-to-date diagnostic and treatment programs, as well as information on how to access the wide array of professionals to provide advice on support services available to manage these diseases." Dr. Bernick says.

For more information about these programs, please call 474-0532.

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