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## Alzheimer's Disease Research Center opens in Madison

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MADISON (WKOW) -- The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine now houses one of the premier research labs for Alzheimer's Disease.

It is a debilitating disease, affecting 160,000 families in Wisconsin. Alzheimer's patients suffer memory loss, poor judgment, and language problems -- making treatment difficult.

"The person with the disease has trouble communicating, so we don't know what to do to help them," said Paul Rusk, executive director of the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Association.

And the number of cases is spiking -- 115 million people worldwide by the year 2050.

"Over the age of 85, 40 percent of people at that age have Alzheimer's disease," said Dr. Sanjay Asthana. "Another 20 percent have some kind of memory problem."

Dr. Asthana is director of the new Alzheimer's Disease research center. He says the illness creates social and economic burdens for families.

"The disease is so devastating. It's projected that millions of people will have the disease in this country, and bankrupt the Medicare system, unless we find an effective treatment."

Doctors have lofty goals -- to recognize and treat the disease before symptoms start. Using brain scans, blood tests, and psychological exams, doctors hope to discover the secrets of Alzheimer's -- most importantly, how it happens and who's going to get it.

One of the most unique features of the UW center is a statewide registry of at-risk Alzheimer's patients. Doctors say these 1,300 people -- some as young as 20 -- could be a key to treatments down the road.

"We know these people are at genetic risk for the disease," Dr. Asthana said. "So, we'll follow them over 20, 30 years to see who develops the disease and why they're different from those who don't."

Proactive steps, researchers hope, will uncover the mystery of Alzheimer's.

Said Rusk, "Participating in research is an incredibly powerful way to fight back."

UWSM received a \$7 million grant from the National Institutes of Health and Aging for the project. It is one of only 17 centers in the entire country to take on this kind of work.

People at UWSM hope to open another Alzheimer's center in Milwaukee, targeted at helping minority patients.

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Madison Magazine, 10/01/08



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