



WorriedAboutMemoryLoss.com

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Huntington's Disease Awareness Month.

May is **Huntington's Disease Awareness Month** and the Michigan Dementia Coalition is teaming up with its partner, the Huntington Disease Society of America (HDSA) Michigan Chapter, to bring more public focus to Huntington's Disease (HD).

Huntington's disease is a devastating, hereditary, degenerative brain disorder for which there is, at present, no effective treatment or cure. HD slowly diminishes the affected individual's ability to walk, think, talk and reason. Eventually, the person with HD becomes totally dependent upon others for his or her care. Huntington's disease profoundly affects the lives of entire families -- emotionally, socially and economically.

Named for Dr. George Huntington, who first described this hereditary disorder in 1872, HD is now recognized as one of the more common genetic disorders. "More than a quarter of a million Americans have HD or are "at risk" of inheriting the disease from an affected parent." states Dave Stickles, President of Huntington Disease Society of America – Michigan Chapter. "HD affects as many people as Hemophilia, Cystic Fibrosis or muscular dystrophy. The HDSA – Michigan Chapter estimates that there are 1,000 or more people in Michigan with HD."

Early symptoms of Huntington's disease may include impaired cognitive ability or mobility, depression, mood swings, forgetfulness, clumsiness, involuntary twitching and lack of coordination. As the disease progresses, concentration and short-term memory diminish and involuntary movements of the head, trunk and limbs increase. Walking, speaking and swallowing abilities deteriorate. Eventually the person is unable to care for him or herself. Death follows from complications such as choking, infection or heart failure.

HD typically begins in mid-life, between the ages of 30 and 45, though onset may occur as early as the age of 2. Children who develop the juvenile form of the disease rarely live to adulthood.

HD affects males and females equally and crosses all ethnic and racial boundaries. Each child of a person with HD has a 50/50 chance of inheriting the fatal gene. Everyone who carries the gene will develop the disease. In 1993, the HD gene was isolated and a direct genetic test developed which can accurately determine whether a person carries the HD gene. "The test cannot predict exactly when symptoms will begin." Said Gary Dunbar, Ph.D., Director of Neuroscience at Central Michigan University. "In the absence of a cure, some individuals "at risk" elect not to take the test."

The Michigan Dementia Coalition is the coordinator of a statewide public awareness campaign focusing on dementia and memory loss. WorriedAboutMemoryLoss.com is an education campaign showcasing the facts of memory loss and dementia, and the resources available in Michigan for persons with dementia and their caregivers.

For further information you can call the Huntington's Disease Society of America's Michigan Chapter's helpline at 1-800-909-0073, go to the Michigan Chapter's web site at www.hdsami.org, or write the Michigan Chapter at HDSA Michigan Chapter, Dimondale Center, 4000 N. Michigan Road, Dimondale, MI, 48821-9774. For more information online connect to www.WorriedAboutMemoryLoss.com. For more information on the Michigan Dementia Coalition, contact Micki Horst, Michigan Public Health Institute at 517-324-7318.