



Washington, D.C., 23 June 2011

House hearing on "Global Strategies to Combat Alzheimer's Disease"

The hearing on 23 June 2011 for the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights of the House Foreign Affairs Committee instigated an important dialogue among experts and Congressmen on the need to *fight Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia on an international level*. The House Chairman, Representative C. Smith (R), has been at the forefront of efforts to cooperate internationally on this issue along with his colleague, Rep. Markey (D). The ranking member, Rep. Payne (D) also stressed the need to make this a high-priority, bipartisan issue as the number of Alzheimer's cases are expected to rise in the coming years. Multiple expert witnesses testified as to the urgency in solving this global problem, including an Italian researcher, Dr. Frisoni, who was able to offer his testimony via teleconferencing.

Witnesses Confirm the Gravity of the Alzheimer's Epidemic

By 2050, Dr. Acosta affirmed, the number of dementia cases worldwide is likely to augment from its current standing of 37 million to 115 million. These figures combined with the effects of Alzheimer's on the global GDP make the issue unavoidable and have prompted a movement to pool research and data to find better treatments or ideally, a cure. Multiple witnesses pointed to other potentially fatal illnesses in which joint research has led to much success in treatment and prevention, specially with regard to heart disease, cancer, and HIV. Scientists seek to further Alzheimer's research in the areas of risk factors, early onset cases, disparities among populations, and the effects of genetic and environmental components on the prevalence and severity of this degenerative condition.

Demographics

Another important issue to address is the demographic trends in the global development of the disease. Currently, 57% of all Alzheimer's disease cases originate in lower-middle income countries, a statistic which is likely to rise to about 70% by 2050. Factors which may be affecting this trajectory in lower income societies include human displacement by violence and civil wars, malnutrition, stress, as well as the chances of this ailment being overlooked vis-à-vis the focus on other diseases such as malaria or

typhoid fever. Therefore, a global investment should be made in support of research development to eliminate the toll of Alzheimer's on victims and caregivers.

International Cooperation

Dr. Frisoni from the NeuGrid Consortium and the European Alzheimer's Disease Consortium, both based in Europe, remarked that "Alzheimer's is a global challenge that requires a global answer." He emphasized three areas of cooperation and coordination that are essential for success, notably funding, research, and application. The other panel members stressed the effectiveness of efforts such as A.D.N.I. (Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative), a study which began in the U.S. in 2004 and has inspired similar initiatives which have sprouted up in Europe, Japan, and Australia. The best way to make these studies effective and cost efficient is to combine the work of researchers internationally to generate a collective path forward. There is still much to be learned about Alzheimer's onset and comparative research on worldwide populations offers a host of benefits in determining the causes of the disease and new treatment options. There is much that can be done on an immediate transatlantic level also, as the House **Chairman C. Smith specifically adjourned the meeting with his hopes to coordinate with the European Parliament in the coming months on this pressing topic.**

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