

# And Now, Are There Any Questions?

by Bernard Groulx, MD, FRCPC

While reviewing the articles in this issue of *The Canadian Alzheimer Disease Review*, I had “flashbacks” of all the question periods that have followed conferences given by myself, or others, on Alzheimer’s disease. Regardless of whether the conferences are presented to family physicians, nurses, other paramedical personnel or the general public, three questions almost always arise: “What is the difference between delirium and dementia?” “What about all these ‘natural’ therapies like Ginkgo biloba?” and “When is it time to take away someone’s driving privileges if he or she is suffering from dementia, and how can a family or general practitioner do it?” These are the topics specifically addressed in this issue. As well, the article from the Alzheimer Society of Canada (page 22) provides clear, informative material and, in this case, the point of view of the sufferer.

Although the article from the Alzheimer Society is a frequent favorite among readers, this time the other three articles, as mentioned above, really hit home for me.

Dr. Kenneth Rockwood’s piece on delirium (page 4) is very comprehensive and concise. He reminds us that study after study shows that a high number of patients in hospitals or nursing homes suffer from delirium that is misunderstood, misdiagnosed, mistreated or simply ignored. These unfortunate facts come with a heavy price—extremely morbid and even mortal consequences for our patients. The tables Dr. Rockwood includes in his article are useful for serving as a constant reminder of the adverse outcomes, either near-term or long-term, associated with delirium. I know that is how I will use them.

In terms of alternative therapies, I have been waiting—or hoping, rather—for someone to take the time and effort to research the topic and give

an expert opinion on the value of these therapies for dementia. Questions on these therapies are frequently asked and I have been notorious in my “slip-sliding” maneuvers to answer. Dr. Peter Lin does a superb job of explaining the nature and possible advantages of Ginkgo biloba (page 9). He also is equally efficient in his plea for prudence and common sense. There are, of course, potential side effects, but he mainly reminds us that the lack of regulation for Ginkgo biloba and other herbal products introduces a risk to our patients. We need to be fully aware of this and any/all other risks.

Finally, is there anything more delicate or difficult than deciding when a patient cannot drive anymore? The majority of my patients are male Veterans (although I am sure the following also holds true for female patients) and not being able to drive is perceived as a true tragedy. Many patients have equated freedom, autonomy and perhaps, sadly, personal value with being able to drive a car for themselves and their spouse. The decision to terminate driving always leads to interminable and sometimes painful discussions within families and in the doctor’s office. However, Dr. Peter McCracken (nobody else, in my mind, could have written such an intelligent article on this topic) starts by exposing the “other side of the coin”—the consequences of not being attentive to the driving issue and/or not doing anything about it (page 14).

So... are there any questions? Because this *Review* certainly answers three of the most important ones.

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