

November 6, 2013

Dear Colleague:

In New York there are an estimated 320,000 individuals with Alzheimer's and other dementias. The number of New Yorkers with Alzheimer's disease is likely underrepresented due to the lack of early detection/diagnosis and under-reporting on death certificates. The New York State Department of Health (Department) strongly urges health care personnel to consider the importance of early detection/diagnosis of cognitive impairment and dementia. There are numerous benefits of early detection:

- Symptoms of some dementias can be reversed
- Increased treatment options and access to information, services, and support
- Advance planning for health, housing, finance and care and risk reduction
- Option to participate in clinical trials recruiting individuals in the early stages of dementia
- Relief gained from better understanding by patients and caregivers
- Better overall health outcomes
- Reduced health care costs

The Alzheimer's Association has released new recommendations to help clinicians detect cognitive impairment during Annual Medicare Wellness Visits. The recommendations provide comprehensive guidance on how to assess for cognitive impairment in primary care settings during a time-limited office visit. Detecting possible cognitive impairment is the first step in determining whether or not a patient needs further evaluation. For more information about the comprehensive guidance on how to assess in primary care settings, please go to the following link: <http://www.alz.org/health-care-professionals/cognitive-tests-patient-assessment.asp>

If you do have a patient with suspected or diagnosed Alzheimer's disease or another dementia, please refer them to the local support resources in your area. The Department supports the Alzheimer's Disease Community Assistance Program, contact information is available at <http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/dementia/help.htm>. If you have questions about this letter or identification of dementia, please contact the Department's Alzheimer's Program at [518.474.0662](tel:518.474.0662) or one of the Alzheimer's Disease Assistance Centers at this link: http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/dementia/alzheimer/adac_map.htm.

In closing, I want to reiterate the importance of assessing for cognitive impairment. The Department continues to work with local and national organizations to promote awareness of Alzheimer's disease and make strides toward finding a prevention or cure while providing support for the many individuals and families affected by this disease. Please visit the Department website for additional information on Alzheimer's disease and other dementias at <http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/dementia/>.

Thank you for working with us to promote the health of all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nirav R. Shah". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nirav R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H
Commissioner of Health