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## Memory problem among elderly normal – consultant

**KOTA KINABALU:** It is normal for an elderly person to start having some memory problem.

Lecturer and Consultant Neurologist at the Department of Medicine (Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, UPM), Dr Lim Poh Hin said in his talk entitled, 'Ageing Brain – how to improve on memory capacity', that it was normal to lose a percentage of mental ability every year as our brain undergoes changes in neurotransmitter which leads to the decline in encoding new memories and the reduction in episodic memory (inability to remember the source of the memory).

Yet despite that, the brain continues to have the ability to preserve procedural or implicit memories and have vocabulary capability, he said.

Memory problems, said Dr Lim, are attributed to several factors – thyroid disease is one of them. Aside from that, people suffering from lack of sleep, anxiety, depression and boredom also face memory problems, he said.

Malnourishment also contributes to the condition, he added.

However, the most serious form of memory loss and one which is considered abnormal for older people are caused by dementia which causes progressive decline of mental ability.

Dr Lim warned that people suffering from dementia suffer problems in their memory, language, problem solving,

judgment and even face personality and behavioral changes.

"It is incurable and it is not a normal part of ageing," he stressed.

When a person suffers dementia, they start forgetting what they ate, and even what they did five minutes ago, said Dr Lim.

"They suffer from disorientation – not knowing where they are and lose the ability to keep track of time. It is important for their caregivers to keep telling them where they are and what time and date it is," he said.

Additionally, a person with dementia also has poor concentration and is unable to learn any new skills.

"They will have problem caring for self and will become depressed, frail and weak. At a later stage they suffer reduced speech or become mute," he said.

Statistically, one out of 20 people who are above 65 years old risk acquiring dementia, while for the age range of 80 years old and above, the ratio goes up to one person for every five people.

"And that risk doubles every five years," he said.

He explained that the contributory factors to dementia are various but noted that it affects those with lower education, or /and is suffering from hypertension, or / and those practising unhealthy diet.

HIV and nutritional deficiencies are also listed

as among the contributing factors, he said.

Dr Lim advised caregivers of a person suffering from dementia to refer their patient to a neurologist or let them undergo psychotherapy if they are suffering from depression.

"Attention should be given in this matter and the good news is, some of these depression syndromes can be treated and the person will have an improved quality of life. About 80 to 90 per cent of depression sickness can be treated successfully with medication," he said.

He also advised caregivers to create a baseline for the person they are caring for and track the deterioration in their mental ability.

"Learn about dementia care and outline a realistic care plan."

He then stressed the importance of caring for a person with dementia with dignity and communicate with them in a proper manner.

"Get their attention -- some older people cannot hear and see well. Allow them to make some small decisions if appropriate, and ensure the loss of vision and hearing are addressed."

He added that when a person suffers from dementia, they may have problem addressing their needs, hence the caregiver has to understand and provide for them the environment that is most conducive for their wellbeing.



Dr Lim (left) and Dr Philip listening to questions posed by participants of the event yesterday.