

Wisconsin Medicine: Livestream on ending Alzheimer's

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MADISON, WI (September 17, 2020) — Robert Golden sees the danger of Alzheimer's disease.

"Among the 10 most deadly diseases [in America]," he said, "it's the only one that cannot be prevented or cured at this time."

Golden is the dean of UW-Madison's School of Medicine and Public Health, and he hosted a conversation about Alzheimer's research during the Wisconsin Medicine Livestream event on September 15. Golden's guests included several of the UW's leading dementia researchers: Sanja Asthana, the founding director of the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center; Sterling Johnson, the Finley Professor of Geriatrics and Dementia; Cynthia Carlsson, the Holland Professor of Alzheimer's Disease; and Carey Gleason, a clinical neuropsychologist and member of the UW faculty.

Asthana noted that six million Americans suffer from Alzheimer's and gave an overview of UW studies of the disease. He urged viewers to see the value of the university's work. "It is quite clear that the only way we can [beat] Alzheimer's is through cutting-edge research," he said.

The key biomarker for Alzheimer's is a buildup of amyloid proteins, and Johnson described efforts to increase doctors' ability to recognize amyloid accumulations. "Our goals are to identify Alzheimer's before its symptoms appear," he said. "You think of Alzheimer's affecting the brain, and that means we have to get in and study

the brain.”

Carlsson added that amyloid isn't the only risk factor. Alzheimer's also tends to show up more often in people who have high blood pressure, diabetes, poor sleep, traumatic brain injury, depression, and stress. “The good news is these are things we can do something about,” she said. She showed how a decrease in these other risk factors project to a 10 percent reduction of U.S. Alzheimer's cases by 2050.

Gleason discussed recruitment for research projects, which have often drawn on an overrepresentation of white people, even though the prevalence of Alzheimer's among Black and Native American populations is much higher. The UW has made a concerted effort to improve recruitment of underrepresented populations in its dementia studies, and the university's success in this area is due to the way it has involved subjects as partners in the research process. “We see them as true partners,” she says, “and not just bodies from which we collect data.”

Golden brought forward questions from some of the hundreds of viewers who watched the event live on YouTube. To hear more from the members of the panel, view a recording of Wisconsin Medicine. The series is offered via YouTube and will continue into the fall. The next event will be September 29 and will cover the future of medicine.