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## Alzheimer's may strike Latinos earlier in life

Non-Hispanic whites with disease begin to show symptoms about age 68, seven years ahead of others, study says.

**BY ERIC BERGER**

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HOUSTON – Alzheimer's disease may strike Latinos several years earlier than non-Hispanic whites, a new study suggests.

The research has direct implications for the Orange County area, home to more than 940,000 Hispanics, or nearly 33 percent of the population.

Neurologists who performed the study evaluated 175 Latino and non-Hispanic white patients at five clinics in the United States. They found that Latinos with Alzheimer's experienced the first symptoms of the disease seven years earlier than non-Hispanic whites, at an average age of 67.6 years.

"This is the first definitive study proving Latinos seem be afflicted with Alzheimer's at an earlier age (than non-Hispanic whites)," said Carl Cotman, director of the UCI Institute of Brain Aging and Dementia. Cotman said a difficulty in conducting these studies is the reluctance of Latinos to discuss the disease or seek treatment.

Family members of Latino elders need to recognize the early signs of Alzheimer's, which include a diminished ability to plan, choose and make decisions, the study's authors said.

"The message for Latinos is pay attention to these symptoms; look for them earlier," said Dr. Christopher Clark, the lead author and a neurologist at the University of Pennsylvania.

"Take the initiative and avail yourself of a medical opinion," he said.

The study adds to earlier work that suggests Alzheimer's may strike Latinos more often than Non-Hispanic whites. Clark and others researching this area say they do not know why these trends exist.

A neurologist who reviewed the study said although it presents an intriguing finding, more research must be done to definitively prove a disparity between Latinos and non-Hispanic whites.

"Given all of the variables, it's just not all that clear cut," said Dr. David Rosenfield, of The Methodist Hospital Neurological Institute.

Latino family members, Rosenfield said, may simply be more attuned to problems with their elders and may get them to see a doctor sooner. Rosenfield also said the study also does not differentiate between recent immigrants to the United States and second- or third-generation Americans.

Clark acknowledged that the study is preliminary in nature, seeking to determine whether what he and other neurologists were casually observing in their clinics had any scientific basis. He said he was sure that future work should clarify some of these questions.