



Dr. Kate Zhong works to boost Alzheimer's trials



Dr. Kate Zhong, a geriatric psychiatrist and pharmacologist, poses for a photo with her dogs Teddy, left, and Ella in her home in Henderson, Monday, Nov. 28, 2016. Chitose Suzuki/Las Vegas Review-Journal

By HEIDI KNAPP RINELLA | LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL | December 13, 2016

Vegas Voices is a weekly question-and-answer series featuring notable Las Vegas.

Dr. Kate Zhong is deeply involved in finding a cure for Alzheimer's and related diseases. As the senior director of clinical research and development for the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health, she developed the center's research department.

In July, however, she moved to a position where she can have influence on the problem on a broader, national scale, as chief strategy officer for the Global Alzheimer's Platform Foundation. The foundation, based in Washington, D.C., works to increase current and future enrollment in clinical trials for Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and other diseases.

Zhong received her medical degree from West China University of Medical Sciences and her master's in pharmacology and residency in psychiatry at the University of Toronto. She's a geriatric psychiatrist and pharmacologist and a resident of Henderson.

Review-Journal: *How and why did you become interested in Alzheimer's disease?*

Zhong: From very early on, I was always interested in research. My legal Chinese name is Xue, which means "infatuated with learning." My mom was a university professor and my dad was a researcher, and I went to medical school at age 16 and delivered my first baby at age 20, when I didn't know how to drive. My grandmother was really the mentor in my growing-up. My parents, as intellectuals, were sent to the countryside during the cultural revolution in China. My grandmother mentored me and inspired me. She had bound feet, but she was very determined. I think this is why I developed an affinity for older people at a very

young age. I was just drawn to elderly people for their life, their experience, their wisdom. When Alzheimer's disease hit those people they became a completely different person; they were no longer the wise, intelligent. From my first Alzheimer's patient, I really wanted to find the best possible treatment. My grandmother didn't have dementia, but my aunt did, and I watched her progressing in this dreadful disease. It's a heartbreaker as a family member and caregiver. As a researcher, this really drew me to this area.

R-J: *Do people confuse Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia?*

Zhong: This is the most frequently asked question. Alzheimer's is one of the most common forms of dementia; about 60 percent of dementia patients have Alzheimer's. Dementia is a cluster of clinical symptoms. The underlying causes are in many forms, and can be a stroke, Parkinson's or, of course, Alzheimer's.

R-J: *How many people have Alzheimer's?*

Zhong: Alzheimer's right now affects 5.4 million Americans. In the United States now, every 60 seconds someone develops Alzheimer's. It's astonishing. Globally, it's about 44 million.

R-J: *Are the numbers increasing?*

Zhong: Age is one of the biggest risk factors for Alzheimer's. As you know, we are really facing a gray tsunami; every day about 10,000 people in the U.S. are turning 65, and this is going to continue for the next 18 years or so. For people who are 65 or so, the prevalence is about 3 percent, and every five years it doubles. By the time people reach about 85, about 40 percent would have a diagnosis of Alzheimer's.

R-J: *Is there a cure in the foreseeable future?*

Zhong: We are working very hard on that. In the last 12 years, there hasn't been a new medication or treatment approved by the FDA. There are many reasons for that. It's a very expensive process and it's a very long process; it takes about 12 years and \$2 billion for us to bring a new medication from the (laboratory) bench to the bedside. One of the critical elements and one of the critical steps for a trial are patient enrollment. That's part of the core mission of the GAP Foundation.

R-J: *What can people do to protect themselves against Alzheimer's?*

Zhong: We have a lot of scientific evidence showing that lifestyle plays a very important role in minimizing and potentially preventing Alzheimer's. People can take control of their lifestyle in an effort to reduce risk: exercise, food and nutrition, mental engagement, social connection, relaxation and sleep and control of underlying medical conditions. (Go to healthybrains.org for more information.) Cook fresh food and enjoy it with your family. Nevada is one of the highest states with a projected increase in people with Alzheimer's for 10 years to come; we rank second only after Alaska. I built the research department at the Cleveland Clinic and now want to bring it to the national level. What happens in Vegas can truly benefit the world.

Read more from Heidi Knapp Rinella at reviewjournal.com. Contact her at hrinella@reviewjournal.com and follow [@HKRinella](https://twitter.com/HKRinella) on Twitter.

<http://bit.ly/2hJx10w>