

New evidence that viruses may play role in Alzheimer's

BY LAURAN NEERGAARD
AP MEDICAL WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP) — Viruses that sneak into the brain just might play a role in Alzheimer's, scientists reported Thursday in a provocative study that promises to re-ignite some long-debated theories about what triggers the mind-robbing disease. The findings don't prove viruses cause Alzheimer's, nor do they suggest it's contagious. But a team led by researchers at New York's Mount Sinai Health System found that certain viruses — including two extremely common herpes viruses — affect the behavior of genes involved in Alzheimer's.

The idea that infections earlier in life might somehow set the stage for Alzheimer's decades later has simmered at the edge of mainstream medicine for years. It's been overshadowed by the prevailing theory that Alzheimer's stems from sticky plaques that clog the brain.

Thursday's study has even some specialists who never embraced the infection connection saying it's time for a closer look, especially as attempts to block those so-called beta-amyloid plaques have failed.

"With an illness this terrible, we cannot afford to dismiss all scientific possibilities," said Dr. John Morris, who directs the Alzheimer's research center at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. He wasn't involved in the new research but called it impressive. The study also fits with mounting evidence that how aggressively the brain's immune system defends itself against viruses or other germs may be riskier than an actual infection, said Alzheimer's specialist Dr. Rudolph Tanzi of Massachusetts General Hospital. With Harvard colleague Dr. Robert Moir, Tanzi has performed experiments showing that sticky beta-amyloid captures invading germs by engulfing them — and that's why the plaque starts forming in the first place.

"The question remained, OK, in the Alzheimer brain what are the microbes that matter, what are the microbes that trigger the plaque?" explained Tanzi, who also had no role in the new research.

The team from Mount Sinai and Arizona State University came up with some viral suspects — by accident.

SENIOR HAPPENINGS

• Tuesday at 6:30 p.m., Mark and Jeanine Jackson will present "From C Rations to State Dinners" at The Hub on Smith. The Jacksons, two U.S. diplomats, will present a program on their military and foreign service careers spanning nearly 40 years of overseas government assignments in more than a dozen countries. Jeanine Jackson is a native of Sheridan. The presentation will be held in the café of The Hub. It is free and open to all. Contact Jane Perkins or Jean Harm with questions.

• Join The Hub for conversations in Spanish facilitated by Mario Montano, Spanish teacher at Sheridan High School, Thursday at 6 p.m. The evening will provide an opportunity to brush up on your Spanish speaking skills. This is a pilot program and will continue if there is enough participation. Please sign up at the front desk. Organizers are looking for a minimum of 10 people. Contact Jane Perkins at The Hub for more information.

• Join The Hub for a Bighorn Canyon boat tour and barbecue lunch July 5. Departure time from Heritage Towers will be 7:30 a.m., 7:45 a.m. from The Hub and 8:10 a.m. from the Tongue River Valley Community Center. The group will return to Sheridan at 4:30 p.m. The trip will include lunch on the marina deck followed by a two-hour boat tour of Bighorn Canyon. The suggested contribution for registered seniors is \$80. The fee for unregistered folks is \$85. Sign-up and pre-pay at The Hub on Smith by June 28. A minimum 10 people must sign up for the trip to happen. Contact Jean Harm or Jane Perkins at (307) 672-2240, ext. 108 with questions.



COURTESY PHOTO

Judy and Bruce Penn moved to Sheridan three years ago and have started utilizing programs such as Day Break.

Day Break folks 'top drawer'

Have you ever met someone and known right away that you were going to be friends? That is how I felt upon meeting Bruce Penn. There was something about his mischievous smile and good sense of humor that made me realize we were destined to be friends.

Working at The Hub on Smith and especially in the Day Break Adult Day Services program has given me the opportunity to meet members of the community and be an active part of their life, people like Penn.



BARB BLUE

Penn's life had centered around ranching, growing up on a ranch in the Jump-Off country of South Dakota. Early on he developed a love and respect for horses. He's a true cowboy. His life would take him many places away from the ranch. He proudly served in the infantry during the Vietnam War and rode in the last mounted Calvary of 1968 in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Bruce graduated from college in Spearfish, South Dakota, as an industrial arts teacher. He worked some as a substitute teacher but made a living for his wife, Judy, and three sons as a carpenter. Eventually, the Penns moved to our neck of the woods, settling in Clearmont. Bruce continued to work in the construction business, building many of the houses at the Powder Horn. Spare time was spent riding (hopefully not getting bucked off) horses.

Three years ago, Bruce and Judy Penn moved to the Sheridan area after

27 years in Clearmont. Judy Penn started noticing subtle changes in her husband. He couldn't remember things one day to the next. He was repeatedly asking the same questions over and over. Feeling the need to be productive, Bruce Penn would go out to his shop and start reorganizing or taking things apart. An appointment at the Sheridan Veterans Affairs Medical Center resulted in a diagnosis of early on-set dementia.

"We both knew something was wrong, but to have it confirmed was devastating," Judy Penn said. "It's scary not knowing what will happen next. We are taking one day at a time."

Judy Penn had heard about the caregiver support group at The Hub but thought she could handle it on her own. Friends continued to encourage her to reach out for help. Upon joining the group, she found Family Caregiver director Stella Montano and the other participating caregivers provided a comfort and needed outlet. Many of the caregivers at group were using or had used Day Break as a source for respite; they suggested that this might be an option for Bruce Penn.

Judy Penn's initial feeling was that her husband wouldn't care for a place like Day Break. It was a very hard step to make that first phone call and then to walk through the door, but they haven't regretted the decision. Judy Penn has expressed her appreciation to the Day Break staff for their kindness, help and support.

"Coming to Day Break the first time was hard," Bruce Penn said. "I didn't know what to expect and was a little apprehensive. It didn't take long to feel comfortable; people at Day Break are top drawer."

On days that Judy Penn is at support group or volunteering at the Catholic

thrift store, the Day Break staff knows that her husband will be moseying in the door. Once here, you can usually find him in the game room. He has gained the reputation as the resident authority at the pool table. He is willing to share his knowledge and encourage others in the particulars of billiards. Other days, he may sit and read or work with the volunteer group to label the home-delivered meal trays. He is always joyful and seems to love giving the staff a hard time, which they gladly reciprocate.

Day Break is dedicated to helping people remain in their homes. Our services are geared toward the individual. We start with the basics by helping with activities of daily living, showering, eating, walking, etc. Then we focus on learning what each person is about, what they achieved and are proud of in their life and what they love. This is the first step in realizing what makes each individual fulfilled.

Some see Day Break as a club, a place to start new friendships. We offer opportunities to meet with others while participating in activities throughout the day ranging from classic games to volunteer work.

Bruce Penn is a wonderful advocate for the Day Break program, always welcoming and encouraging to new participants. One final note about my friend: He has never strayed from his ranching roots; he still has five horses. Spending time with the animals gives him purpose and offers him the therapy only a horse can provide. If you share this common interest with Bruce Penn, if you like to talk horses or shoot a mean game of pool, come on down and visit. The coffee is always on and Bruce Penn's pool tips are free.

BARB BLUE is the director of Day Break at The Hub on Smith.

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Thurs- Baked Italian Pasta
Fri- Braised Beef Tips
Sat- Chicken Tarragon Salad
Sun - Chicken Fried Steak
Mon- Braised Pork Ribs w/Black Eyed Peas & Collard Greens

SUMMER ACTIVITIES: INSPIRED WALKERS, BIKES, HIKES, DAY TRIPS

Tue- Steamboat Point Loop Trail	Departs The Hub at 9:00 a.m.
Wed- Music in Café	10:30 a.m. John Petrie- guitar
Thurs- Toastmasters	6:45 a.m. Community Room
Fri- Dominoes	9:30 a.m. Café
Sat- Billiards Open Play	9 a.m. Billiards Room
Sun- Double Pinochle	12:30 p.m. Tech Noo

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Lunch Service Hours: 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., 365 days a year at 211 Smith Street Home Delivered Meals (307) 672-6079

Loan Closet, Outreach, and Administration Services, 672-2240. Mondays - Fridays.

Help at Home Services, 675-1978. 232 North Brooks: Mondays - Fridays.

Day Break Adult Care Services, 674-4968. 241 Smith Street: Mondays - Fridays.