

Actor Hector Elizondo Shares his Personal Story of Alzheimer's

By Ivette Sandoval

Alzheimer's disease is something that affects more than 5 million Americans, including 210,000 in Illinois. It's a disease that affects, many elderly people, and takes a toll on families, because often they don't understand what their loved one is going through. Hector Elizondo, Emmy Award winning actor shared his personal story on how the Alzheimer's disease touched his life and his family in particular. He and Dr. Alan Dengiz have teamed up to raise awareness of Alzheimer's Dementia and stopped in Chicago to help educate and share his story.

We all remember Hector in memorable roles, in movies like *Pretty Woman*, *Princess Diaries*, and even as Callie's father in *Grey's Anatomy*. Currently, he's in the new season of *Monk*, as the new therapist. He is a renowned actor who has been in over 80 films and series and who despite the fame, he is a warm and down-to-earth person who enjoys life and who is now sharing his story about Alzheimer's hoping to help others by sharing valuable information.

"My mother passed away from Alzheimer's in 1974,



Actor Hector Elizondo and Dr. Alan Dengiz, are raising education awareness about Alzheimer's.

my family was devastated by her illness, my father was the main caregiver and subsequently he became very ill and actually passed away just before she did," said Elizondo. His father passed away a month before she passed away and she happened to pass away on his birthday before he died. Elizondo's mom's illness took a toll on the family, and especially on his father since he was the primary caregiver. "The toll it took caring for her 24/7 without knowing what she had, without knowing the progression of the disease, knowing very little and feeling helpless, eventually his body broke down, he even ended up in the sanitarium,

he had a nervous breakdown," he says. Meanwhile, Hector had to keep working, raise a family and do a Broadway show in between.

"It was very difficult, but I was much younger, resilient, I didn't expect life to be easy, this came as a surprise, and it was terrible and frustrating." Back then there wasn't much information, it's been 34 years since Elizondo's mother passed away, and even though there is no cure for the disease, there is medication and information on how to cope with this life-altering disease. "If my father had the information, the knowledge, if we would've convinced him that it was not his fault,

a lot of people from that generation thought, "Why is this happening to me?" As opposed to the question, "Why not me?" Elizondo explains that on occasion, his mother didn't know where the door was, seeing her reflection in the mirror was a new thing, she thought it was somebody else, she will be looking at herself thinking it was another person and laughing and looking around and rediscovering the person.

It's nothing personal, it's simply a genetic disorder, even though, those who know nothing about the disease blame themselves because they wish that they could do something to cure their loved ones, but they just can't. Dr. Alan Dengiz, MD, is accompanying Elizondo, to help educate people about the disease. "There is a genetic predisposition in 6 maybe 7 different genes that may predispose someone to develop Alzheimer's disease, however your lifestyle, your diet, other things like that can play a really big role," said Dr. Dengiz. He adds that, even if you're genetically programmed to develop

Alzheimer's you may be able to delay that by many many years, by eating right, by exercising, by exercising your brain, by doing the things that are important to improve circulation. "If you have good circulation in your brain, it may be able to slow down the process, it's not hopeless, all of us will be touched by the Alzheimer's disease in one way or another, but just because it's in our family doesn't necessarily mean that we will get it," said the doctor.

Anything that will stimulate your brain, it's not just a crossword puzzle, its learning new information, getting involved in something that you haven't been in before, learning to play a musical instrument when you're older, it stimulates a part of your brain. This is how your brain will be able to take over some of the things that you have lost in the other part of your brain, engagements, being involved in your community, your church, even learning a new language. Music is another way to stimulate the brain.

"There was always music in the house, there was always dancing, there would've been more if we would've understood, and there would've been less frustration if we have the information that we have now," said Elizondo. "Now there is a light that has been shining in that dark tunnel and this is a different time, if my father had had this then I'm convinced that he would've lived many more years."

Some of the symptoms for this disease, include, short-term memory problems, forgetting people's names, losing track of your daily lifestyle. "I've had professors that

have come to see me for an evaluation because they suddenly aren't able to do their lectures and they don't understand why, but suddenly they can't find the right words, they're writing on the blackboards and can't spell the words and they panic of course and those may be early signs of Alzheimer's disease," said the doctor.

Some of the treatments for Alzheimer's include the Exelon patch, which is a patch that you place on the skin of someone who has Alzheimer's disease, and replace it everyday, and through the skin you absorb a medication that enhances their cognition, it improves their activity of daily living, overall improves functioning, but it's not a cure for the disease. One of the things that people need to realize is that once you're diagnosed you may still have several years ahead of you.

The numbers are growing and it is estimated, that 45-50% of people in their 90's have the disease and risk increases as you get older. "In the Hispanic community the numbers are very similar to the Caucasian community to the African-American community, we don't think there's a significant difference, but there is a significant difference between men and women," said Dr. Dengiz. Women are more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease, by about 2-3% higher risk, the reason is unclear.

Dr. Dengiz says, that the www.caringforalz.com website is a great place to start once a person is diagnosed. In this website you can find tips on how to cope with someone who has Alzheimer's, tips and a lot of valuable information you need to know.

Kellogg's Frosted Flakes Otorga el Primer Premio Logros Juveniles

La marca de cereal Kellogg's Frosted Flakes se complace en anunciar a la ganadora del primer Premio *Logros Juveniles* del 2008, Nichyria Byrd, de 11 años, de Chicago, IL. Como parte de la iniciativa "Earn Your Stripes" Kellogg's Frosted Flakes creó el Premio Logros

Juveniles para festejar a los niños que salen y luchan jugando su deporte favorito. Ya sea que corra con sus compañeras en "Girls on the Run" en el campo de baloncesto, o que participe con el equipo de danza de la escuela, Nichyria siempre muestra respeto, autoconfianza y

entusiasmo, verdaderamente muestra un ejemplo de su saludable estilo de vida. Nichyria viajó a Los Angeles, Ca para aceptar el premio de Kellogg's Frosted Flakes "Logros Juveniles" en el Desayuno de ESPY el 16 de julio.