

Our Guest Editor

Talks about an update on current issues in dementia

Looking at the past ten years, a mixed result.

PETER A. LICHTENBERG



It has been ten years since *Generations'* last update on Alzheimer's disease and related forms of dementia, which continue to affect millions of Americans—now more than five million with Alzheimer's alone—with huge costs to individuals, families, and society. In that time, we've seen progress in understanding the condition and improving the lives of people afflicted. But the breakthrough treatments that some had expected remain elusive. Peter A. Lichtenberg, this issue's guest editor, is an erudite and compassionate clinician, researcher, and advocate nationally recognized for his work related to late-life dementia—the perfect guide for our current look at what is still one of the greatest challenges for an aging society.

Lichtenberg is director of the Institute of Gerontology and a professor of psychology, psychiatry, and physical medicine and rehabilitation at Wayne State University. He has combined the approaches of these disciplines to improve research and clinical practice and influence policy across a variety of areas, including long-term care and late-life depression and dementia. He received the Alzheimer's Advocate Award from the Michigan State Council for Alzheimer's Disease and most recently served as chair of the APA's Committee on

Aging and on its Presidential Task Force on Integrated Care for an Aging Population.

Looking at the past ten years in the struggle to deal with dementia, Lichtenberg finds a mixed result. "In the inner circle, where people do the research and have all kinds of information, we've made progress in that we now focus on treatments of all kinds, social as well as medical." And, he says, progress has been made in "engaging" people who have dementia—that is, making a connection with the person and helping him to interact with the world. "Regarding medical treatment," he says, "we know we must protect the brain at an earlier age, but we have yet to make treatment breakthroughs.

"And in the outer circle, where people with dementia and their families are, it's not changed. It's left to families to find out whatever they can about the disease and to search for the services they need. Our system hasn't even begun to change regarding the needs of older adults," he says. "We must turn it on its head. For caregivers, the challenges are constant. How do we keep company with them under those losses and pressures? Providing appropriate support and services—that's how we can enhance the lives of people with dementia and their families."

—MARY JOHNSON