

THE FORGETTING

A Portrait of Alzheimer's



Encore National Broadcast
August 3, 2008 at 9 PM ET, check local listings

PRIME TIME EMMY AWARD WINNER

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Critically-acclaimed, winner of the Primetime Emmy Award

THE FORGETTING: A PORTRAIT OF ALZHEIMER'S

National rebroadcast Sunday, August 3 at 9pm ET (check local listings) on PBS

Followed by a new, 30-minute special hosted by David Hyde Pierce

THE FUTURE OF ALZHEIMER'S

Sunday, August 3 at 10:30pm ET on PBS

"An invaluable, incredibly moving documentary that examines the disease that 'robs people of themselves.'" —*Robert Bianco, USA Today*

A "first-rate documentary about Alzheimer's." —*TIME Magazine*

When the documentary ***THE FORGETTING: A Portrait of Alzheimer's*** was originally broadcast on PBS in 2004, more than 10 million people tuned in to watch. Since then, there have been significant advances in Alzheimer's research, but still over two million more Americans have developed the disease.

This summer, PBS will present an encore broadcast of ***THE FORGETTING: A Portrait of Alzheimer's*** on **Sunday, August 3 at 9pm ET** (check local listings). The 90-minute special will be immediately followed by a *new* half-hour panel discussion recorded on the eve of the 2008 Alzheimer's Association International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease in Chicago. Actor and Alzheimer's champion David Hyde Pierce hosts. Pierce, who has experienced Alzheimer's first-hand through the illness of his grandfather and his father, moderates a panel of medical experts and scientists who discuss the latest developments in research, early diagnosis and treatment, and what it all means for patients and their families.

“While recent advances show exciting progress and promise, effective therapies to combat Alzheimer’s disease remain frustratingly out of reach,” says Pierce. “With each year that passes, my fear for my generation grows. Millions of baby boomers will get Alzheimer’s disease if we don’t find a way to beat it soon.”

THE FORGETTING documentary focuses on the scientific quests to eradicate Alzheimer’s and the families whose lives have been steadily ravaged by it. Despite recent advances in the laboratory, the experience of living with Alzheimer’s has not changed very much. In fact, of the four principal patients featured in *THE FORGETTING*, all but one has died since the original broadcast in 2004. And Harry Fuget and Thomas McKenna—who cared so lovingly for their wives as they battled the disease—have also died. As is common with Alzheimer’s disease, the role of primary caregiver for so many years took a toll on both Harry and Thomas’ own health.

“Like so many, the families who shared their stories in *THE FORGETTING* all had one major motivation in common—they wanted to let other people facing similar situations know that they are not alone, that there is help, and that they, too, faced Alzheimer’s with dignity and grace,” says award-winning producer and director Elizabeth Arledge.

THE FORGETTING follows the plight of scientists and clinicians like Dr. Steven DeKosky, director of the Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center at the University of Pittsburgh, who will be taking over as vice president and dean of the University of Virginia’s School of Medicine on August 1, 2008. In addition to treating patients like Gladys Fuget, Dr. DeKosky conducts testing to determine whether a person’s memory lapses are the product of normal aging or Alzheimer’s. The number of people living with early stage Alzheimer’s and managing their own lives is quickly rising, due largely to advances in early diagnosis. These people represent a new face of the disease. By 2050, the Alzheimer’s Association projects as many as 16 million Americans will have the disease, up from approximately 5 million today.

For Dr. DeKosky’s patient Rita Scully, the news is not good. DeKosky believes she probably has early stage, mild Alzheimer’s. There is no cure and no way to predict how the disease will progress. She will be monitored and take medications that hopefully will slow the progression. While she is fortunate to have a son to take care of her, the reality is Rita may need to rely on him for many years to come. As the disease spreads, the brain begins to shrink; personality changes and long-term memories eventually disappear. In the late stages speech becomes impossible. Then, finally, the parts of the brain that control basic functions like breathing and swallowing shut down. The time between diagnosis and death can be anywhere from eight to 20 years.

For the children of Alzheimer’s victims, there is the added fear of one day getting the disease themselves. And in particular, when the genetically-linked strain of the disease occurs, it threatens all family members, like the ten children of Julia Noonan. Julie Lawson remembers the onset of her mother

Julia's Alzheimer's disease. "People were wondering if she was having a nervous breakdown," Julie recalls. "A doctor finally diagnosed it and we had no comprehension of what Alzheimer's was, none." When her mother finally died of pneumonia, Julie felt relieved that their ordeal was over. "I almost felt like we're done. We don't have to do this again. And then (my sister) Fran came down with it and that's when we realized we're not done. That's when I realized the magnitude of this disease. This is going to hit us again."

Using specially-created animations to reveal the complex workings of the brain, ***THE FORGETTING*** helps viewers understand how Alzheimer's begins, how it does its damage, and what kinds of techniques medical researchers are using to arrive at a way of conquering it. And by following the scientific adventure story as leading scientists search for answers to Alzheimer's mysteries, ***THE FORGETTING*** offers a fascinating insider's glimpse of the latest work on the disease and what potential treatments are in the pipeline.

While there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's, researchers at many labs around the country are searching for ways to slow the progression of the disease. Some of the most promising research has been focusing on plaque deposits in the brain that seem to form long before there is any noticeable forgetting. But being able to see these plaques inside living brains has eluded the grasp of scientists for over a century, leaving no way to gauge the impact of potential drug therapies short of waiting to observe the effects on patients' behavior. This could take years.

When Dr. DeKosky was at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center in 2004, his team had a key breakthrough that involved the development of a staining compound called the Pittsburgh Compound that allows scientists to see Alzheimer's plaques in living brain tissue without harming the patient. This vital research tool could enable scientists to monitor the impact of drugs designed to attack the plaques. Working in collaboration with radiologists at the Alzheimer's Disease Research Lab at Massachusetts General Hospital, the two teams have been able to use the Pittsburgh Compound to look deep inside the living brain tissue of research mice. In an extremely hopeful moment, ***THE FORGETTING*** is with the scientists as they begin their first human tests in the U.S., tests that show the Pittsburgh Compound to be a promising leap forward in Alzheimer's research.

And yet scientific progress could not help many of the patients in ***THE FORGETTING***. For the Noonan siblings and their children, however, the research could prove to be the difference between growing old with grace or losing their minds—and eventually their lives—to Alzheimer's.

"This disease affects everyone. As I speak with audiences around the country I find that there is usually only one degree of separation between every person in the room and an Alzheimer's patient. This is a disease that simply cannot be ignored and will not go away anytime soon," says Naomi Boak, Executive Producer of ***THE FORGETTING***.

“We need to continue to bring national attention to this growing health crisis.”

Credits

Major funding for ***THE FORGETTING: Portrait of Alzheimer’s*** and ***THE FUTURE OF ALZHEIMER’S with David Hyde Pierce*** is provided by MetLife Foundation, Public Television Viewers and PBS. MetLife Foundation, established in 1976 by MetLife, supports health, education, civic and cultural programs throughout the United States. For over 25 years, MetLife Foundation has been involved in the fight against Alzheimer’s and is proud to support this program.

THE FORGETTING: Portrait of Alzheimer’s and ***THE FUTURE OF ALZHEIMER’S with David Hyde Pierce*** are produced by Twin Cities Public Television. The executive producer is Naomi S. Boak. David Hyde Pierce is host of ***THE FUTURE OF ALZHEIMER’S***. The producer and director of ***THE FORGETTING*** is Elizabeth Arledge. The documentary is based on the book, “The Forgetting: Alzheimer’s: Portrait of An Epidemic” by David Shenk. The editor is Doug Quade. Cinematography by Erich Roland. Original music is by Mason Daring. Gerald Richman is executive in charge.

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Publicist: Erin Martin Kane, emklpr, 508-309-3530, erin@emkpr.com