Play ‘Forget Me Not’ comes to Houston

In an effort to promote awareness of Alzheimer’s disease, Baylor College of Medicine, the African-American Network Against Alzheimer’s, Gala of Productions and the Defender Media Group are teaming up to bring the award-winning play “Forget Me Not” to Houston.

It comes to the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts on Saturday, Aug. 1, at 2 p.m.

Tickets are free of charge but pre-registration is required.

“ Forget Me Not” focuses on a family struggling to accept and manage their father’s Alzheimer’s disease.

Playwright and producer Garrett Davis said he believes in using the performing arts as a vehicle to raise awareness about health issues affecting the Black community.

The production features Tony Award nominee Samantha McSwain, Kyra Millard, LaTanya Simon, Deon McGee, Jason Bête, Asia Hargrave and Brandon Scott Johnson.

Davis is CEO and founder of Gala of Productions, based in Winston Salem, N.C. His urban theater company has produced more than 20 plays and a sourced experience inspired him to write “Forget Me Not.”

“My grandmother died from Alzheimer’s disease and my grandmother was the one who passed away,” Davis said. “Coming back from college, my grandmother not knowing who I was. I didn’t know how to deal with that.

“So the play brought closure to that part of my life. The play is not about her or mine, it’s about helping those who are living with Alzheimer’s.”

How does he feel about the play’s success?

“I don’t consider it a success until we find a cure,” Davis said. “My grandmother died from Alzheimer’s disease and we haven’t participated in the research.”

“Only 3 percent of clinical trial participants are African-American, so we need to get those numbers way up.”

Interested Blacks between 64 and 85 are urged to learn more about the A4 Study, a clinical trial for older individuals who may be at risk for Alzheimer’s. Call 844-247-8839 or visit A4study.org.

Alzheimer’s disease.

Doody said. “We are also part of the state funded research consortium to study the conditions from normal aging through Alzheimer’s dementia to develop better ways to diagnose and treat it.”

“Dr. Caryn Glosch, Ph.D., an assistant professor of neurology at the Baylor center, also shared the good news about research.

“We are learning more and more about how this disease works and about the mechanisms that are involved with the disease process. Even through the failures that we have, the teaching is more about how to affect the disease,”" Glosch said.

“so we’re finding that these therapies and other treatments that we’re using didn’t work in one population or other set of people but if we start it earlier maybe we can have more impact on the disease and how we’re treating it. We’re making a lot of progress and that is a good thing.”

Doody added that it’s still unknown why Blacks are disproportionately affected by Alzheimer’s.

“All communities everywhere in the world are susceptible to AD, but people with cerebrovascular risk factors, like high cholesterol and diabetes, are at higher risk,” Doody said. “Associated risk factors may play a role in the African-American community.”

Glosch wants the Black community to know that Alzheimer’s is a real threat.

“It’s not just normal aging and it’s not just memory,” she said.

Doody emphasized awareness as well.

“My hope for the African-American community is for it to become informed and to filter information for its members so that they, like all of the communities in Houston, can have the same options for care and research,” she said.

Facts & figures

• Alzheimer’s disease is not a normal part of the aging process. It destroys parts of the brain responsible for memory, learning, decision-making and behavior. Patients also lose motor abilities like walking and swallowing. The condition is ultimately fatal.

• African-Americans are two to three times more likely than non-Hispanic whites to develop Alzheimer’s.

• Alzheimer’s is the sixth leading cause of death overall in the U.S., and the fourth leading cause of death for older African-Americans.

• There are medicines that can treat the symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease but there is no cure. It is the only disease in the top 10 that is increasing and the only disease without a drug that can stop its progression, slow it or prevent it.

• The majority of Alzheimer’s cases occur in the South based on cost. The economic burden by region is South, 49 percent; Northeast, 20 percent; Midwest, 18 percent; and West, 13 percent.

• Alzheimer’s tops the list of the most feared diseases (54 percent), followed by cancer (26 percent), stroke (10 percent) and heart disease (6 percent).

Sources: African American Network Against Alzheimer’s, National Institute on Aging

Alzheimer’s discriminates

Prevalence of cognitive impairment

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