

Brain Diseases Focus of April 7 Talk at SWOSU

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Dr. Kenneth Hensley, a scientist in the Free Radical Biology and Aging Research Program at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, will speak on brain diseases on Tuesday, April 7, at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

The 7 p.m. event in the SWOSU Memorial Student Center Ballroom is free and part of the Al Harris Library Showcase series. The public is invited and encouraged to attend.

Dr. Hensley will speak at a non-scientist level on what is known about these diseases, current scientific research and the possible prevention and treatment.

Dr. Hensley holds a B.S. degree in biology and chemistry and a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Kentucky. The author of several journal articles and book chapters and the co-editor of a book, *Methods in Biological Oxidative Stress* which was published by Humana Press in 2003, Dr. Hensley joined the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation staff in 1996.

Dr. Hensley and other scientists at OMRF have been searching for years for the causes of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Huntington's, and Lou Gehrig's diseases and have made some interesting discoveries. They have already discovered new, naturally occurring molecules that help regulate the immune system in the brain, and these show promise for slowing or stopping the progression of some of these brain diseases. He currently is testing these compounds in potential treatments for Huntington's disease, and he plans to explore their effectiveness in combating other neurodegenerative diseases.

Dr. Hensley said research focus is increasingly zeroed in on neuroinflammation-when the body's immune defenses 'over-react' and damage nerves in the brain and spinal column-and researchers are now searching for ways to prevent the body's own immune system from causing damage to nerve cells in the brain. These diseases exact a tremendous toll not only on patients but also on their families, and researchers are focused on finding new ways to prevent and treat these illnesses that rob so many of so much.

Brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's, can be devastating to the patients and their families. According to the Alzheimer's Association, 10 million baby boomers will develop Alzheimer's in their lifetime and as many as 5.2 million people in the United States are currently living with Alzheimer's. According to the Parkinson's Foundation, three percent of the population over age 65 is affected by Parkinson's disease, and that figure is expected to double over the next 40 years. According to the Huntington's disease Society of America, about 30,000 people in the United States have Huntington's disease and estimates of its prevalence are about 1 in every 10,000 people.