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## Early Rising

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Posted: Wednesday, August 10, 2011 2:21 pm

### Prem Shah Adds New Twist to MD Career



ST. PETERSBURG—Even though he's only 27, Prem R. Shah, MD, gives a nod to Bristol Court as a symbol of a new direction in his young medical career—establishing and managing assisted living facilities exclusively for patients with dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

"I didn't have anyone in my family with Alzheimer's, but I saw a tremendous amount of people with this disease during my travels around the world, as well as during my internships in Atlanta," said Shah, executive director of Bristol Court Assisted Living Facility in St. Petersburg.

Shah grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of a highly successful businessman who had opened an eye hospital in the family's hometown in India, and had moved the family from Canada to the United States in the 1980s to focus on building a strong side business.

Shah grasped complex concepts early on, beginning flying lessons when he was in elementary school. By the time he graduated from Lakewood High School, his family had 20 hotels in their portfolio, from a single Best Western to Holiday Inns, LaQuintas and a Courtyard by Marriott. Instead of following his older brother into the family business, Shah headed abroad, where he studied at the Medical University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland, and completed his medical education at Xavier University, School of Medicine.

After earning medical degrees from both institutions, Shah completed internships and post-graduate clerkships in behavioral health and psychiatry at the DeKalb Medical Center near Atlanta, Ga. He focused on dementia patients and developed growing expertise in Alzheimer's disease. That's when Shah realized he didn't want to practice medicine in a traditional way, which involved being isolated in an exam room and only providing a fraction of a patient's care.

Todd Antin, MD, the psychiatrist who hired him, agreed with Shah's self-assessment.

"Dr. Shah is extremely bright and has a keen way with patients," noted Antin. "The demand for assisted living facilities and centers catering and focusing on this disease will be vastly important. Using that medical knowledge will provide families and residents with comfort."

Antin pointed out that Shah shared a passion for round-the-clock dementia care and could leverage the family's hotel business knowledge to apply to assisted living facilities. With baby boomers entering senior years at a record pace, the percentage of dementia cases is expected to rise rapidly.

Research showed that existing facilities usually had just a few beds allocated for dementia patients, and weren't equipped to manage difficult cases. Also, those accommodations could be very expensive, ranging upwards of \$6,000 in some facilities.

In 2005, the family's Liberty Group company opened Central Tampa Assisted Living Facility to work with social service agencies to take in seniors with dementia, especially those who are at risk of becoming abused, neglected, homeless or jailed. The facility's nearly 100 beds are almost always fully occupied.

Shah's concept of an affordable assisted living facility focusing solely on dementia and Alzheimer's patients began to take shape in 2009, when he began teaching full time at medical schools across the country, including Emory University. He collaborated with nationally recognized psychiatric and dementia experts in various studies, cases, and trials and contributed to several published case studies, journals, and articles relating to Alzheimer's disease and other impairments.

From his home base in Tampa—Shah installed a shower in his Bristol Court office yet lives elsewhere—he plans to open more assisted living facilities across Florida exclusively for dementia and Alzheimer's patients. In his spare time, when he's not studying for an executive MBA in healthcare administration at the University of Miami, he enjoys playing competitive tennis, deep-sea fishing, private piloting and cooking at home. An avid world traveler, he's visited more than 50 countries.



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