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Alzheimer's researcher ready for climb

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(leaving Aug. 31 for Africa)
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Simon Fraser University researcher Faisal Beg is ready to climb one of the world's most challenging mountains and has personally raised more than \$11,000 to advance research on Alzheimer's disease.

The SFU School of Engineering Science professor, whose own research focuses on the early onset of the disease, leaves Aug. 31 for Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro. He'll be one of nine hikers ascending the mountain, a near 6,000-metre trek, organized by the Alzheimer Disease Society of B.C.

'Right now there is no good reliable way to detect the onset of the disease,' says Beg, who studies signatures in MRI brain scans of those with the disease and compares them with those of healthy brains.

Beg is an avid hiker and outdoorsman who sees the awareness-raising trek as a convergence of his personal and professional interests. Juggling a busy summer teaching semester while also presenting at an international human brain mapping conference and completing grant submissions, Beg managed to find time to train by hiking in the nearby Vancouver mountains.

His biggest worry, he says, is how his brain will respond to low levels of oxygen at high altitude, something he's never experienced.

Beg says Alzheimer's and other dementias are expected to show a huge spike as Canadians live longer, thanks to substantial investments in conquering acute illnesses. 'That puts all of us who live longer at the risk of developing these diseases that are found to occur more frequently in older individuals,' Beg says.

As Alzheimer's robs afflicted individuals of their capacity to think properly and draw on their life's experiences stored in memory, they become heavily dependent on caregivers to carry out the simplest of daily activities, notes Beg.

"I've come to realize the great challenges that are faced by caregivers and families whose lives are turned upside down by this disease,' Beg says. "This trek is a way to show my understanding and passion, driven by my own scientific perspective, and to highlight the need for increasing investment in research towards early detection, management and cure to help individuals suffering from dementia."

Beg, a Coquitlam resident originally from Bhopal, India, receives funding from the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research and the Pacific Alzheimer Research Foundation.

At the outset, Beg was worried about how he would raise the minimum \$10,000 required to qualify for the hike with the Alzheimer society team.

Now having raised it, he says he has been 'bowled over' by the encouragement, support and generosity that he has received from family, friends, colleagues and wellwishers. He intends to continue raising funds and awareness of dementias.

To learn more about the Alzheimer Disease Society of B.C., see <http://www.alzheimerbc.org/>.

To contribute to Beg's fundraising, see: <http://www.helpAlzheimerBC.ca/>