ABOUT ALS

- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is popularly known as “Lou Gehrig’s Disease” in the USA, as “Motor Neuron Disease” in the UK and Australia, and internationally, as “ALS/MND.”

- ALS is a degenerative disease of the upper motor neurons (motor nerve cells in the cerebral motor cortex of the brain) and the lower motor neurons (motor nerve cells in the brain stem and spinal cord) in adults. Motor neurons extend their fibers (called axons) to the skeletal muscles.

- Motor neurons contract skeletal (voluntary muscles for moving the body. Motor nerve degeneration causes weakness of the affected skeletal muscles.

- People with ALS may have difficulty walking, using the arms and hands, talking and swallowing. Not all people with ALS, however, lose the ability to walk, talk, or swallow.

- Invariably, ALS results in progressive respiratory muscle weakness and the inability to breathe. Respiratory failure will ensue unless noninvasive or invasive breathing support is used.

- The average ages of onset are 40’s to 70’s. Typically, the mind remains intact.

- Approximately, 10% - 15% of people with ALS, have or had a family member with the disease, and thus, are diagnosed with Familial ALS.

- Although there is no treatment to stop the disease, the symptoms are manageable. Breathing support, management of oral secretions, and comfort care are life choices.

- ALS need not be fatal when breathing support maintains adequate ventilation and complications are avoided.