



How Alzheimer's disease impact the family

Imagine your grand-father wandering off from the house at 6pm on a Sunday evening after a super bowl match. Imagine you and your family searching frantically for him in the house of Uncles, Nephews and friends for days and weeks without finding him.

Imagine he was found walking along streets laughing and clapping his hands! Imagine your grand-mom getting lost after a shopping spree from Wall mart super stores. Imagine that her body was later found in a ditch along the subway. After the darkness has dropped and you brought her back to the house, imagine that you found her sprawled asleep, suspecting nothing and her dreams very much disturbed. Couple hours again, you found her in an unpleasant spot in the house where the wind and echo stirs, and storms splash towards the doorway! This happens to lots of men and women, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, employed or unemployed who have Alzheimer's disease. A man can go for a walk and would not return home again. A woman can go for shopping and would not return back to family again. Some Alzheimer's have lost their way among the tangled mazes of the street or swamp and sink into some pit or slough; others decoyed into dismal quagmire where they are found lying conformably or uncomfortably. Even the fiercest tempered, loud of tongue, the genius of ideas, the rocket of science and strong of arms lose their memory to Alzheimer's disease. One of the leading causes of death in old people in American society today is Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's could also be one of the leading causes of death among the elderly in Africa and the Caribbean. The price of this disease hurts members of the family and the cost of controlling it is very worrisome and disappointing. People who live with Alzheimer's disease may be more likely to feel a sense of dissatisfaction and frustration. Anyone but Alzheimer's patients would have felt unwilling to linger with this sickness for a long time. What is it that gives Alzheimer's patients and families value and meaning in life? Is it self-expression or dependence on family for help at all times? Is it lack of organization and the inability to know where one is at any moment in time? But who is there whose story of memory loses is more pathetic or terrible to hear? Who is there whose family has been so changed by this late-life illness leaving them with nothing but ferocious agonies and sorrows? How there have family members tolerated such illness in such a silence for a very long time? The tragic experiences we know about this illness are hard enough for families to bear! And there is nothing we can say to make it worse!

According to Alzheimer's association, an estimated 5.3 million Americans suffer from this disease and it is the seventh leading cause of death. Studies by some mental health literatures reveal that, Alzheimer is generally called a disease of the human brain. Unlike Dementia,



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Alzheimer's causes brain cell to die permanently. Once the brain cells dies, the memory of the victim will lose natural control and as this condition progress and spreads, it affects a growing number of intellectual, emotional and behavioral abilities. While dementia causes intellectual decline and poor judgment, Alzheimer's gradually affects every aspect of the human body. In advanced societies, Alzheimer's disease comes in a form of depression while in developing countries like Africa and the Caribbean; it comes in a form of stroke, brain infection and hypertension. Symptoms associated with Alzheimer's include but not limited to: loss of short-term memory and mild-personality changes, such as social withdrawal and mild apathy. Adults (men or women) with Alzheimer's have trouble with abstract thinking, handling money or other personal affairs. They have trouble knowing where they are at any given time. They have problem understanding what they are reading and they lack the ability to organize activities for the day. Different from Post traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) patients, Alzheimer's always feel troubled and irritable when dealing with family members. This is a peculiar experience patients witness at the onset of this illness. But in later stages in the illness, patients become seriously confused and disoriented, showing significant personality and emotional changes, develop incontinence and ultimately become unable to care for themselves (UTHCPC pamphlet, 2009).

These symptoms are common to elderly in both cultures. The inability to remember makes it difficult for most elderly individuals in both cultures to keep a definite account of the past, present and the future. Patients with Alzheimer's occasionally becomes irritable, troubled with themselves and others. These patients appear to be very poor in their overall physical appearances. They are often confused and seriously disorientated showing significant personality and emotional changes. While this is the case, majority of them often develop incontinence and are unable to care for themselves when left alone. At the moment, scientific research and medical studies have not been able to identify the exact cause of Alzheimer's disease. Despite scientific silence and weakness on this subject, protein miss-folding and aggression have been linked to brain damage experienced by Alzheimer's patients, said Claudio Soto, PhD Director of the George P. and Cynthia W. Mitchell center for Alzheimer's disease and related Brain disorders at UTHealth. For a very long time now, scientists have demonstrated more zeal to find solution to this problem yet they have been unable to cure this late-life mental illness. The reason is because there is no break through yet. Because there is no cure at the moment, medication appears to be the only therapeutic outlet that controls symptoms.

Treatment and How Family Could Assist Patients



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Studies have identified different ways families can assist patients of Alzheimer's disease. One of the ways family can help is constant monitoring and assisting them to take their medication on a daily basis. Families must keep them on a constant watch and observation to avoid them from wandering away like the shopping grandmamma. We are aware that medication is not good for old people because it compounds their condition as old patients. Patients who believe strongly in the efficacy of alternative therapy (Africans and Caribbean's) always hold this as an excuse to avoid taking prescribed medications. Families therefore, should help old patients to be aware of their medications and the overall physical health status. They should work closely with therapists, physicians to find regimens that are safe and effective (UTHCPC Pamphlet, 2009). Families and friends can as well help by offering emotional support in a form of understanding, patience, affection, empowerment, guidance and encouragement. Any form of encouragement from friends and family members can transform into positive changes and attitude. Positive change torches the physical, mental, emotional and social aspects of human lives. It is altogether important that family encourage patients seeking further treatment if current treatment is not working for them. Since caring for the elderly is financially demanding, families and friends are to continue in this generous work of charity. In your distress, it is not astonishing that you will bear a double load of suffering, a double load of pain. A man completely lost who do not know that he is lost should not be despised by family members. Ignorance of the fact that they are lost lessens the voltage of agony they brought to family members, friends and themselves. The kindest thing would be for family members to be there to see and to bear with them. Family members should take them to psychiatric centers that deliver comprehensive psychiatric programs and clinical social services. Good psychiatric facilities are composed of psychiatric physicians, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, occupational therapists, dieticians, certified Nursing Assistants etc. These professionals can provide Alzheimer patients with individualized care or outpatient partial hospitalization program and intensive outpatient assistance, providing continuity of care recently released from the psychiatric outpatient clinics or hospital or requiring a regular structured program. When these professionals and family members engage in assisting patients with Alzheimer's with their conditions, they are not simply empowering them but inspiring them as well.

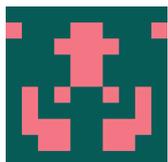
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