

Term paper on alzheimer's disease effects on the caregivers

[Health & Medicine](#), [Disease](#)



Introduction

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a progressive brain illness that incurable. It destroys an individual's brain slowly and affects thinking skills, memory, and ability of an individual to carry out simple tasks. " AD is one common form of dementia that eventually worsens with time" (Alterra, 2007, p. 46).

Dementia is a disorder of the brain that greatly affects the ability of a person to carry out daily tasks. AD begins gradually by first affecting sections of the brain that control thought, memory, and language. With time, the symptoms of the disease become worse and people may have difficulty in reading, writing, or speaking. They may also fail to recognize their family members. Later in their life, people with this condition become aggressive and may even wander away from home. At this stage they require utmost total care. This extreme case of the condition can cause much stress on a family needed to care for an AD patient. Most often, the condition affects people over 65 years, and the risk of getting the disease increases as one grows older. Furthermore, the disease can be distressing to caregivers who have to adjust to taking care of someone; thus they should join support groups and apply patience while dealing with the condition. This paper describes the effects of Alzheimer's disease on caregivers.

Effects on caregivers

Alzheimer's disease is often referred to as a family disease because it affects everyone in the family who watches the health condition of their loved one decline (Alterra, 2007). Therefore, comprehensive treatment of the AD should address the needs of the entire family. The comprehensive treatment

should include educational programs, counseling, and emotional support for family members as they aim at providing a comfortable and safe environment at home.

Caregivers can learn how to keep the person with Alzheimer's disease safe through training, which improves communication and control's unwanted behavior. To reduce the effect of the condition on a caregiver, he or she can participate in training and support groups that allow caregivers to take care of their loved ones better. The responsibility of caregivers changes with time according to the needs of the person with AD.

Taking care of a patient with the Alzheimer's disease influences every aspect of the daily life of the caregiver. Caregivers encounter tests of problem solving, resiliency, and stamina as the patient suffering from Alzheimer's disease lose the ability to perform one task after another (Edel, 2008). The condition worsens over time and could take a long period thereby affecting the well-being of the caregiver. With time, communication for the caregivers decrease, rewards diminish and without sufficient support, caregivers face challenges related to their health. It is vital for the caregiver to maintain emotional and physical fitness. The caregiver should protect and prepare him/herself, work to understand the experience of the patient, and embrace help from support groups to minimize the dangers of care giving and enhance the joys thereof.

Caring for a patient with the Alzheimer's condition can be a heart breaking experience as one witnesses the memories and skills of the patient fading

away. At the beginning, the process of care giving may be easier but as the disease affects more areas of daily life, it is no longer easy to deny the condition. At the advanced stages of this condition, it produces an emotional thrash of sadness and confusion for both the caregiver and the patient (Callone & Kudlacek, 2011). If left on their own, these feelings could have adverse effects throughout the long journey of the caregiver.

Alzheimer's disease can have devastating challenges to the caregiver, which affects the entire life and well-being of the caregiver. The caregiver often experiences overwhelming emotions because the ability of the patient to perform simple tasks reduces. A person with AD usually has difficulties in communicating and thus the caregiver needs to use simple words and a calm tone of voice. This could cause an emotional toll on the caregiver especially where the patient no longer understands language or completely loses his or her speech. If the caregiver is not patient enough with the patient, he or she could experience deterioration of health (Callone & Kudlacek, 2011). The condition also affects a person's ability to perform simple tasks such as bathing, dressing, and eating. If the caregiver has to assist the patient perform all these tasks, it becomes overwhelming to the caregiver leading to emotional problems.

Another challenge experienced in giving care to an Alzheimer's patient includes, fatigue and tiredness as the demands for more care (Edel, 2008). The caregiver exhausts most of his or her energy in performing various tasks for the patient and having to watch the patient all the time. This experience

eventually affects the health and social influence of the caregiver because most time is spent on the patient.

With time, a caregiver loses his or her independence to give care to the patient with the condition. The loss of independence gradually leads to isolation and loneliness as the caregiver totally gives their life to taking care of the patient with the AD. As the condition worsens, it becomes difficult for the caregiver to socialize with other members of the society since the caregiver dedicates their entire life to the patient with the AD.

Most caregivers of patients with the Alzheimer's condition are family members such as a spouse or adult children caring for their aged parents with the condition. Thus the burden of care giving often falls on the family and their resources. " Taking care of persons with the Alzheimer's condition can cause great financial constraints to the family of the caregiver" (Edel, 2008, p. 31). As the role of care giving increases with the demands posed by the condition, it becomes difficult for the caregiver to have a normal working life. Therefore, the sources of finances reduce yet the disease continues to worsen calling for more financial support. This situation can be so challenging to the caregiver that it affects the health of the caregiver. Therefore, it is crucial to weigh the costs and determine the best method to use in giving care to a loved one. Some people opt to take a patient to care facility while others take care of the patient at home. The method that uses fewer costs can assist in reducing the effects of the condition on the caregiver.

The Alzheimer's disease can cause chronic stress to caregivers because of the round-the-clock responsibilities (Alterra, 2007). This stress increases as the caregivers witness the devastating advancement of the disease on their loved ones. If not checked, the stress affects the health of the caregivers and may even affect the response of the immune system. A diminished immune response for the caregiver can slow down the ability to heal after minor injuries and it makes caregivers susceptible to minor infections such as common colds. However, the caregiver can combat this problem by learning ways to manage the stress such as sharing with other caregivers and joining support groups.

The Alzheimer's disease can have devastating effects on the caregiver especially when the caregiver does not understand the condition. The condition could cause emotional disturbance to the caregivers if they are not aware of what to expect as the disease progresses. Studies have shown that when the caregivers and other family members are informed about the disease, the individual with the condition benefits because caregivers personalize the care. Additionally, the caregivers experience less stress if they are aware of the condition and its demands since they know what to expect. The caregivers can improve the quality of life for all persons involved if they understand the AD and learn effective ways of communicating with the person with the disease.

It is important for the caregivers to prepare sufficiently to take care of their loved ones suffering Alzheimer's disease. The caregivers can access books or online sites that provide information about the disease, and on how to cope

as a caregiver with a person having the disease (Callone & Kudlacek, 2011). Besides, the caregiver can join a support group that networks with other caregivers to learn ways of coping with the ever-increasing care giving responsibilities. The caregiver can also consider placing the patient to an adult care facility to reduce the responsibilities involved in caring for the patient. If the caregiver follows these methods, the emotional toll of the condition on the caregiver can reduce greatly. Enrolling the person with Alzheimer to a long-term care facility can offer necessary breaks to the caregiver to improve their emotional life and well-being.

Caregivers often experience great emotional stress with the Alzheimer's diseases because of its association with the elderly. Most people develop the AD in their old age of above 60 years. These people cannot perform their daily tasks even the simplest of all. The ability to perform daily tasks gets worse with AD, hence shifting the entire burden to caregivers (Edel, 2008). At the old age, the immune system of most people is weak and minor illnesses cause great problems on the health of the individual. Therefore, the AD worsens the health of the old causing great physical and emotional stress to the caregiver. Due to the memory loss and deteriorating mental skills, the behavior and emotions of the person with AD change. The patient may experience frustration, anger, and extreme agitations. In addition, these patients exhibit strange behaviors such as screaming and verbal aggression, which could cause emotional stress on the caregiver. These changes in the personality of a loved one eventually exhaust the energies of the caregiver leading to placement of the Alzheimer patient in nursing homes.

During Alzheimer's care, it is essential that the caregiver protect him/herself first. Care giving for Alzheimer's condition is an exhausting responsibility that can cause extreme cases of exhaustion such as burnout on the caregiver (Callone & Kudlacek, 2011). The caregiver may turn to excessive use of alcohol drugs or medications due to the exhaustion from care giving. The caregiver may also become extremely irritable with the patient yielding instances of persistent guilt, anger or anxiety. Eventually, the caregiver lacks overall life satisfaction because of the continual care given to the patient. If not checked, these conditions develop to the extreme cases of burnout for the caregiver.

The Alzheimer's condition can cause endless unanswered questions to the mind of the caregivers who are constantly involved with the patient. These thoughts are often negative and they can create an emotional drain on the caregiver. However, it is crucial for the caregiver to accept each new reality that keeps dawning on him to improve the quality of life and promote happiness. The caregivers should improve their emotional intelligence skills to relieve stress and remain focused in the face of the great responsibilities (Alterra, 2007).

The social skills of a caregiver often deteriorate with time after caring for an Alzheimer's patient. The condition affects interpersonal relationships and it becomes difficult for the caregiver to interact with the patient. Often the lack of communication can affect the psychological well-being of a caregiver. Therefore, the caregiver should try other ways of communicating such as using non-verbal signs to improve communication.

Conclusion

The Alzheimer's disease can have serious effects on the life of the patient because it worsens with time and has no current cure. Caring for a person with the AD can be overwhelming and stressful; thus it is crucial for the caregiver to take care of him/herself first. Alzheimer's care can be a long journey for the caregiver during which rewards reduce, communication decrease, and without sufficient support caretakers face challenges to their personal well-being. One of the greatest costs of AD is the physical and emotional wallop on caregivers and family. Therefore, it is crucial for caregivers to seek support from other caregivers groups and learn about the condition early to minimize the impact of the disease on both the caregiver and the patient.

References

Alterra, A. (2007). *The caregiver: A life with Alzheimer's*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Callone, P. & Kudlacek, C. (2011). *The Alzheimer's caregiving puzzle: Putting together the*

pieces. New York: Demos Medical Publishing.

Edel, M. (2008). Alzheimer's disease: The psychological and physical effects of the caregiver's

role. *Nursing Older People*, 20(4), 27-32.