Women Are Paying the Price of Alzheimer’s

by MARLENE WALLACE

The Silent Crisis

Typically, women are much more likely to get Alzheimer’s disease than men. This disease also tends to put higher demands on women since they are the ones who take on the majority of necessary caregiving responsibilities when a member of their family is afflicted. Women pay a bigger professional and personal price for providing care than men do.

A Heavy Toll

According to a 2014 Alzheimer's Association report, this fatal disease takes a disproportionate physical, financial and/or psychological toll on women. For example, one out of every six women 65+ will develop Alzheimer’s disease sometime during their lifespan as opposed to one in eleven men in the same age group.

Other recent research has revealed that the overall Alzheimer's toll is huge and expanding quickly. New U.S. statistics estimate that this “memory-robbing” disease is almost as deadly as both heart disease and cancer. Females are close to two times more likely to develop Alzheimer's than they are to get breast cancer. In addition, cases of Alzheimer’s are expected to at least triple by the year 2050.

How Women Bear the Burden of Alzheimer's

At least twice as many women administer Alzheimer's care than men. This is prolonged, exhausting, time-consuming care where women often have to cut back substantially on their paid work hours, lose their job-related benefits and/or have to give up their jobs completely. In addition, constantly looking after a loved one who is gradually losing his or her memory as well as slowly dying certainly takes an emotional toll.

Below are more detailed statistics showing some of the differences between male and female caregivers who are employed at the same time as they are caring for someone who has Alzheimer’s disease:

- 20% of women versus only 3% of men went from doing full-time work to working on a part-time basis while being an Alzheimer patient’s caregiver.
- 11% of men versus 18% of women had to take a leave of absence from their paid jobs.
- 11% of women, as compared to only 5% of men, quit their jobs.
- 5% of men, as compared to 10% of women, lost valuable job benefits.

Contributing even further to the ongoing Alzheimer's burden placed on women, when compared to men, is the fact that there are 2.5 times as many women giving intensive 24/7 care to an Alzheimer's sufferer. Female caregivers are also much more likely than male caregivers to experience feelings of isolation and/or depression (e.g., 17% of women as opposed to 2% of men).

The Importance of Awareness

Even though Alzheimer’s disease is the biggest health threat within the US, it is still frequently misunderstood. While aging is the greatest risk factor, everyone – male or female, family history or not – is at risk of developing Alzheimer's.
The current vice president of medical and scientific affairs at the American Alzheimer's Association says that as many as 50% of people with Alzheimer's disease are not even aware that they have it. Many individuals think experiencing memory issues are just a normal part of the aging process.

Almost one out of every five Medicare dollars is spent on someone who is living with either Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia. This year alone, approximately US$214 billion will be spent on this condition according to the Alzheimer's Association.

The Alzheimer's Association hopes that promoting more awareness of the disturbing statistics cited above will result in additional support for ongoing medical research. All American citizens need to band together to protect the greatest asset they have – their brains!

For more information on Alzheimer’s disease, please visit the Alzheimer's Association website at www.alz.org/.