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# **Alzheimer's Crisis Emerging, But Progress Being Made**

Alzheimer's is an emerging crisis as the population ages.

One in eight persons 65 and older has Alzheimer's, and that number increases to nearly 1 in 2 persons aged 85 and older, according to the Alzheimer's Association 2009 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report.

By 2050, the number of individuals aged 65 and older with Alzheimer's is projected to number between 11 and 16 million unless medical breakthroughs identify ways to prevent or more effectively treat the disease.

"The fact is that the older the population the more cases of Alzheimer's there will be," says Dr. David Knopman, a Mayo Clinic neurologist.

Seventy percent of people with Alzheimer's live at home where friends and family take care of them. More than 40 percent of family and other unpaid caregivers rate their emotional stress as high or very high.

So, what are we doing about it?

The Alzheimer's Association organizes memory walks nationwide to help research and fund support and education programs in local communities, including the Alzheimer's Association Helpline. Helpline has highly trained and knowledgeable staff answering the phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in 140 languages. Call 1-800-272-3900.

In Minnesota, legislation was recently passed to establish an Alzheimer's working group to examine the needs of individuals diagnosed with the disease, the services available to them, and the capacity of the state to meet current and future needs. The working group and other interested persons is made up of researchers, professional and family caregivers, and persons diagnosed with the disease. The group will ultimately present a comprehensive report to the governor.

In North Dakota, recent legislation resulted in passage of a dementia services bill. This bill created a care consultant system to provide community education and individual consultation to families impacted by Alzheimer's. This is a tremendous victory and one that will impact families immediately. Other states and communities are beginning to take similar action.

Research has made considerable progress over the past decade and is moving forward with great momentum. Research has led to current therapies that can ease symptoms and reduce the rate of cognitive decline. We now know the fundamentals of the disease process and how it damages and destroys brain cells and their ability to communicate. Experimental drugs are being explored every day. The next generation of drugs will target not only the symptoms but rather the underlying pathology.

Evidence from epidemiological studies suggests that the factors affecting heart health, such as blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose, may play a role in risk factors and protective factors involved in Alzheimer's. Research offers us hope that we can one day prevent the disease.

Most of you reading this blog have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, or are caring for someone with it. Yet, it may seem that our efforts are focused on better days down the road, not today. So, what can you do today? Many things! My recommendations to persons with memory concerns, or who have a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, or who are caring for someone with dementia are:

Know the 10 warning signs. Seek a diagnosis early and get treatment. Maintain overall brain and body wellness. Seek out and understand the resources in your area. Get support (in your own way). Plan ahead. Reduce stress by improving/changing the way in which you (caregivers) communicate. Believe that if you are a caregiver, you must first care for yourself. Join the efforts to move research forward.

Over the next several blogs, I will speak to each of these recommendations in detail. Meanwhile, continue to share with one another your concerns and struggles, but also your joys and successes and the ways you are taking action to live with Alzheimer's. Free Medical Advice published By [Dr Vivienne Balonwu](#).

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