

**A Caregiver's Song: Saving Their Own Melody While Singing Others' Verses**

Ian Kim

Phillips Academy Andover

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## **Abstract**

Alzheimer's caregivers have always been on the sidelines of discussion when it comes to a mental health crisis. The Alzheimer's patient was the one in the spotlight being cared and worried for, while devoted caregivers helping these patients came second. In a progressively older society where medical innovation has increased lifespans, there are more people in the population vulnerable to Alzheimer's due to a shift in population age composition. The role of a caregiver in both the patient's physical and emotional well-being becomes important over the duration of the illness, which can span multiple decades. Global medical advancements offer longer lifespans, which is a big step forward for better and healthier lives, but provides a unique challenge in the context of Alzheimer's care, as it is a disease most common in people aged 65+. This global trend creates a perpetual anxiety for caregivers where now 1 in 17 Alzheimer's caregivers die by suicide and almost a third caregivers actively ideating suicide. A mental health crisis among caregivers leaves both themselves and the ones they look out for vulnerable. A culturally aware and personalized approach to caregiver mental health is noted to raise mental health resilience among caregivers, with individual education about disease behaviors and characteristics following if cases aren't as severe. REACH II's personalized and global mechanisms may help caregivers receive the care they need while accommodating for their patients and personal lives, incorporating culture and emotion as a crucial factor for treatment.

## ***Introduction***

In a growing silver society, caregivers for Alzheimer's disease struggle to find their own songs inside of their patient's verses. Oftentimes, they sacrifice themselves and their melody to care for the sick, putting a toll on their mental health. A silver society refers to a societal trend of increased life expectancy and lower birth rates, leading to a shift in global age composition towards the elderly. Though the population is expected to continue to grow until the mid-2080s as current birth rates are relatively stable, people aged 65 or more will outnumber those under 18 by 2050 (United Nations, n/a). Signs of an increase in the elderly are already prevalent, with the 65+ population increasing by 10.3% in the US while the 18 and under experienced a 0.7% decline, resulting in a 4,000 facility scaleup of neurodegenerative senior care facilities, although that might not be enough to keep up (CNBC, 2025) (Census, 2024).

## ***Background***

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a common neurodegenerative disease affecting 6.9 million people over the age of 65 (Mayo Clinic, n/a). The disease essentially hijacks and breaks functional neurons to a point where they lose connection with the next, eventually making it harder for the brain to deliver neural signals to the rest of the body. Toxic proteins, notably beta-amyloid and tau tangles, form inside the brain, further disrupting the process.

AD provides a unique challenge in the sense that more care is needed as time goes on with distinct three stage progression of the disease. Mild cognitive impairment in the early stages of the disease leads to short term memory loss.(Alzheimer's Association, n/a). Mid-stage AD, otherwise known as dementia, causes difficulties in daily activities, while late-stage AD is

characterized by a complete dependence on others. This broad 3-step process may span over decades of close care.

Caregivers now wonder if they can manage patients for such a long duration of time, while also suffering from a perpetual anxiety that there won't be enough of them to take everyone in. The length and personalized care creates mental health problems during and after the treatment process for the caregiver, further putting caregivers in crisis. Their anxiety arises from unanswerable questions such as when the effects will kick in and how long it will last, and what they can do to help them through their deteriorating health. Both education about the disease and professionalized care concepts may help caregivers maintain their mental health to live their fullest selves and care for the patients the fullest.

### ***Overly Silver Society: Caregiver's Crisis***

A global improvement of medical and general societal quality of life have brought in an unpredicted problem of caregiver shortage and higher demand. From an expected 50 years in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, life expectancy in the US and other first-world countries averaged out to 88.68 years for females and 83 years for males (Willcox & Demetrius, 2024). Medical advancements have contributed to this exponential increase of life expectancy. More specifically, advancements in biopharmaceuticals with its wide integration into therapeutic treatments, has shown positive correlations to increases in life expectancy (Wamble & Ciarametaro, 2019). Increases in pharmaceutical capabilities have opened new doors for treatment in cancer, inflammatory diseases, cardiovascular diseases, organ transplantations, and respiratory diseases (Kesik-Brodacka, 2017). Along with global collaboration, national efforts of starting specified branches of government such as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention or the National Cancer

Institute have increased quality of life for patients in specific categories of diseases (National Institute of Health, 2025).

A focused care method of integrated biopharmaceutical advancements offers a trend of longer, healthier lives of seniors. Ironically, the increase may trigger unexpected pain and anxiety in patient care. Though this trend of increased lives is hopeful, it provides caregivers with unexpected challenges of an increased probability of patients getting Alzheimer's. The unpredictability of having a debilitating disease in the modern day causes health anxiety not only for patients but for those who care for them.

### ***Perpetual Anxiety; Caregivers' Mental Crisis***

Stemming from global events with shifting population compositions causes perpetual anxiety for the Alzheimer's caregivers. Unlike traditional healthcare, caregivers must both be knowledgeable about Alzheimer's and ready to adapt to behavioral changes in the patient as well as checking all the boxes to maintain their patients' physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This includes taking them for walks and exercises, talking to them about their feelings, providing them with nutritious meals to maintain their health (Reed, 2012). This multi-dimensional and personal aspect of care leaves caregivers vulnerable to depression and anxiety.

In fact, deep emotional connection is demanded for better care results, with findings showing that successful care is usually characterized by a maintenance or improvement of emotional connection and empathy towards both the patient and the caregiver over time, even as the disease worsens (Fauth & Hess, 2013). Though emotional connection is necessary for the patient, a caregiver might suffer from a severe mental health crisis. The National Institute of

Health puts dementia healthcare providers at a high-risk of suicide along with veterans and other high-risk groups (Huang, 2022). 1 in 17 Alzheimer's caregivers died by suicide or continuous self-harm, and almost 1 in 3 caregivers participated in suicide ideation (Solimando & Fasulo, 2022). Up to 16.1% of all caregivers have attempted to take their own lives, emphasizing levels of stress to maintain a patient's health. During mounting time demands from patients, it is often hard for them to distinguish themselves from their emotional connection with the patient. Trying to help the patients, they forgot to help themselves.

### ***Emotional Connection: Caregivers' Resilience***

Staying resilient in times where their lives seem to revolve around the emotions of a patient is crucial for caregivers. Caregivers should differentiate themselves and their identity from their emotional connection to the patient. With caregivers spending around 31 hours a week with patients, it can be challenging to do so (Alzheimer's Association, 2024). However, they can also take advantage of this deep emotional connection that they build, rather than letting it consume them. Using this emotional bond, can help both patients feel as if they are cared for and caregivers as they find purpose and connection with the patients themselves, relying less on the rest of the world to provide them with connection. Education on changes in behavior can lessen the blow when the changes occur, as it will notify the caregiver that the actions are beyond the patient's control, and that their bond is still precious to both.

Apart from personal perspective shifts, which can either be helpful or further detriment the mental health of the caregiver, professional systems exist. A landmark study conducted by the National Institute of Ageing dubbed the Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer's Caregiver's

Health (REACH) II, focuses on interventional treatments to improve the mental health of family caregivers, REACH II in particular **put an emphasis on the fact that many health issues are not resolvable alone**, and that personalized care for care providers is important to protect their sanity (Thompson & Currier, 2009).

REACH II focused on personalization and cultural adaptation, with the test group of caregivers and patients being both economically and socially diverse. Through meetings, whether it was on the phone, in person, or in other forms of communication, caregivers got educated on the disease, learned personalized stress management, figured out the art of conflict and problem solving, and got access to further community-based support resources (American Psychology Association, 2011) (Eisdorfer & Czaja, 2008). With significant improvement in self-care being noted amongst the African American, Latino, and Caucasian communities, REACH its effects. The answer isn't to push caregivers into the mold of being healthy, but rather molding the care to help make the caregiver better.

### ***Conclusion***

Alzheimer's affects millions of patients and many more millions of care providers. In a society of increased lifespan due to life expectancy, the pressure of taking care of an increasing number of Alzheimer's cases is being put on the shoulders of caregivers. In this intense and deeply personal job, it is easy for the providers to lose their verse in someone else's song. Emotional health for the caregivers suffering from perpetual anxiety should be met with personalized and catered responses both for the sake of the patient and the caregivers themselves.

Caregivers should attempt to educate themselves and build healthy relationships, allowing them to adjust their emotional and physical response as the disease progresses and

symptoms worsen. It is crucial to remember that actions taken by these patients are always influenced by their disease. Cultural appreciation and personalized meetings to discuss preventative measures and mental health techniques allows caregivers to both develop better bonds with patients and develop an identity outside of that bond. Because patients are cared for the best when their caregiver's perpetual anxiety is gone. To stay resilient, caregivers always strive to find their own songs while helping patients remember their tunes. Their songs of compassion, resilience, and love for themselves and their patients.

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