

Transcript Details

This is a transcript of an educational program. Details about the program and additional media formats for the program are accessible by visiting: <https://reachmd.com/programs/alzheimers-disease-towards-early-detection/weighing-the-burden-of-alzheimers-disease/14134/>

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Weighing the Burden of Alzheimer's Disease

Announcer:

You're listening to *Alzheimer's Disease: Toward Earlier Detection* on ReachMD. On this episode, sponsored by Lilly, we'll hear from Dr. Peter Whitehouse, who's a Professor of Neurology at Case Western Reserve University. Dr. Whitehouse is here to discuss the impact of Alzheimer's disease on patients, their caregivers, and the healthcare system as a whole. Let's hear from him now.

Dr. Whitehouse:

The psychosocial impact of dementia is considerable, but it's quite variable, and the clinician plays an important role in trying to help the patient and family address these challenges. Of course, the psychological part is dealing with the reaction to having a cognitive challenge on both the patient and the family's perspective, and the social relates to how the patient and family relate to the rest of the community with these new challenges that they're facing. But what's really important for the professional is to signal that these aspects are really important, and more important than the medical management in many ways. And so it's often helpful to work with a team, for example, a social worker, a nurse, or the local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, to get the patient and family fully informed about what they can do out in the community to address these social challenges.

Caregivers vary, of course, as to who they are and how close they are to the patient, and so the challenges are very individualized, and that's an important message to say about care in general. The psychosocial aspects require an individualized approach for both the patient and the caregiver. And of course to tell the caregiver to pay attention to their own psychological wellbeing is absolutely key. But the most important thing is to see the patient and the caregiver as a unit that are providing care for each other. It's not just one caregiver there; the patient gets a lot of meaning out of providing care in return. So it's a family issue, often, and it's a family issue that can be dealt with by addressing the patient and the caregiver in the same kind of psychosocial conversation.

Worldwide, the impact of dementia on our healthcare systems is, of course, profound. That's because people with cognitive challenges need special attention, whether they're in a hospital or potentially needing placement in long-term care. And quite frankly, our long-term care systems around the world are rather poorly developed. Mostly, what we need to emphasize is building community services. So healthcare ideally should be in the community.

So hopefully, Alzheimer's disease and related dementias will be a place where we can think more deeply about how we need to improve our entire healthcare system for everybody by providing real care in community and not over-medicalizing the problems of aging.

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