

COMMUNITY COMMENT

By Marty Coelho

Alzheimer's disease is now the 3rd leading cause of death in California, up from 5th place last year. We continue to see a rapid acceleration in the number of people being diagnosed with this disease as we are now more apt to survive heart disease, cancer, diabetes etc. and thus more likely to live long enough to get Alzheimer's.

Alzheimer's is not a natural part of the aging process, but it is in general associated with getting older. One of three people 65 and older are facing the disease. By age 85, you will either have Alzheimer's or be taking care of someone with the disease.

What makes the need even greater here at home is that there are 3,000 people in Del Norte and Humboldt counties that have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. It is overwhelming given the limited medical resources we face in our counties, ~~to think about trying to care for our loved ones here on the Northcoast.~~ 44% of caregivers are now dying before their loved ones with Alzheimer's. The role of these caregivers is 24/7 365 days a year, and at a stress level that is ever increasing as your loved one declines.

It's time to get mad. Very mad. For there is an overwhelming sense of urgency and our society still has not met the challenge. We have over 10,000 people a day turning 65 and we as a nation have done very little to prepare to care for our aging population.

Alzheimer's is the tipping point. We are losing billions of dollars and are working towards losing trillions in medical and caregiver costs to this disease. If we the public do not intercede and fast, we will be left with trying to manage this pandemic from our own homes and alone.

There is hope! Two recent research breakthroughs have occurred. A new drug making its way through clinical trials is able clear "plaque" from Alzheimer's patients' brains, leading to 30% return in cognitive functioning.

The 2nd research advancement was found during a trial of trying to lower Alzheimer's patients' blood pressure. Two groups were formed, one group's goal was to stay at 140, the other group worked for a 120 average. The results for the 120 group were so overwhelming, with a 19% percent improvement in memory function, that the 140 group was changed to 120 for ethical reasons. It has long been speculated that exercise and diet was impacting Alzheimer's and now we have our proof.

You can do something. You can sign up for Humboldt County's Walk to End Alzheimer's and either participate as an individual or form a team. This year's walk will be held on October 13th. We will have our opening ceremonies at the Adorni Center and then take our walk around Halvorsen Park and through Old Town and the Boardwalk. Google Humboldt County Walk to End Alzheimer's to register.

We walk to create the day Alzheimer's has its very first survivor. We walk to provide hope, support, and to raise invaluable research dollars. We walk because to not do so would be giving in to a disease that has taken too much and will take so much more. Help us fight back. Let our legacy be a world without Alzheimer's.