

Testimony of B. Smith
Hearing on The Fight Against Alzheimer's Disease: Are We on Track to a Treatment by 2025?

Special Committee on Aging
United States Senate

March 25, 2015

Thank you Chairman Collins, Ranking Member McCaskill and members of the committee for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Barbara Smith. Most people know me as B. Smith. I've been a model. I've been a restaurateur here in Washington DC for over two decades, thank you to the many of you here today who have been guests there. I've been a TV personality.

But now I have the most import job of all; I'm here because I have Alzheimer's disease. I'm here because I want to make a difference. I'm here because I don't want anyone else to have to go through this. I'm here to ask you to make a difference not just for the five million Americans who have Alzheimer's and their caregivers, but for the future generations who will face this.

Testimony of Dan Gasby
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Thank you Chairman Collins, Ranking Member McCaskill and members of the committee for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

I love my country. Only in America could a kid from Brooklyn be seated before you today to help make a difference for so many. I'm here because, to take a lyric from Jay-Z and Kanye West, "The pain ain't cheap." The pain ain't cheap for the more than five million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease. The pain ain't cheap when you take into account the 15 million caregivers who support them and everyone who has done so in the past.

I'm here to tell you the pain ain't cheap, but the price we will pay is even greater. The number of people living with Alzheimer's disease will triple by 2050. The costs of caring for those individuals will increase to over one trillion dollars. We are facing a modern day social tsunami.

According to a report in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Alzheimer's disease is the most costly disease in America. Between 2010 and 2050, caring for people with Alzheimer's disease will cost America \$20 trillion, in today's dollars, with Medicare and Medicaid bearing most of the burden. While there are no known treatments to prevent or slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease, such treatments could have a dramatic impact on Medicare and Medicaid spending. If a treatment became available this year that slowed the progression of Alzheimer's by keeping individuals in both the mild and moderate stages of the disease five times longer, similar to what has happened with some cancers, \$34 billion would be saved by Medicare and Medicaid in 2020.

My wife was a woman who could do everything but fly. In fact, I even believe I saw her hover once. Alzheimer's has taken a person at the peak of her abilities and made her dependent on others. A caring person who always gave now depends on others to do so. As a husband and friend, I have watched her fight, struggle, cry and then wipe away those tears and move forward.

The greatest resource you have as you in your 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s is the wisdom you can pass to future generations. With Alzheimer's you lose not only that. You lose any sense of dignity and you face the realization that the cost of caring for you could bankrupt your loved ones. Over 15 million caregivers will provide over 17 billion hours of unpaid care to people with Alzheimer's and other dementias in 2015, the cost of which is valued at over \$200 billion. Beyond the economic costs, nearly 60 percent of Alzheimer's and dementia caregivers rate the emotional stress of caregiving at high or very high. Indeed, more than one-third of family caregivers report symptoms of depression.

As an African American, I've seen the devastating effects on my community. And through fear and ignorance, it's been brushed aside and kept in the closet. But you can't keep a hurricane locked up before it annihilates too many. We have an epidemic where I am twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's than a caucasian. It speaks volumes to where the community is headed.

Women are also at the epicenter of this crisis. Almost two-thirds of American seniors living with Alzheimer's disease are women; an estimated 3.2 million women. Among those aged 71 and older, 16 percent of women have Alzheimer's and other dementias compared with 11 percent of men. At age 65, women without Alzheimer's have more than a one in six chance of developing Alzheimer's in the remainder of their lives, compared with one in 11 chance for men. In fact,

women in their 60s are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's disease over the rest of their lives as they are to develop breast cancer.

Further, the technology that we do have to detect this disease is still not accessible to everyone. My wife had a PET scan that showed she had beta amyloid plaques in her brain, a sign of Alzheimer's pathology. This scan was costly, and while we can afford it, there are many who cannot. As I have learned, although the rate of Alzheimer's disease and dementia in the African American community is higher than in whites, they are less likely than whites to have a diagnosis of the condition. And when they are diagnosed, African Americans are typically diagnosed in the later stages of the disease, when they are more cognitively and physically impaired, and therefore need more medical care.

We have invested so much funding into other diseases, even billions into Ebola, something that only recently touched our country. But compared to the epidemic, we spend so little on diseases of the brain. A person without a brain is just a car without a driver. We spend so little on a disease that will affect your family or someone you know.

The United Negro College Fund has said that a mind is a terrible thing to waste. The reason we need more funding for awareness, research and clinical trials is with neurological diseases, the mind you save may be your own.

I implore you, we have a responsibility to those who struggle with this disease and to future generations. We have barely scratched the surface on Alzheimer's. Only in America could a kid like me from Brooklyn help move the needle on this. Only together can we make a difference for so many.