

Navigating Care Decisions:

How Seniors with Dementia and Alzheimer's Manage Their Well-being

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Introduction

Brightview Senior Living, Danvers, is on a mission to determine what is best for its residents. There are three different sections: independent living (IL), Wellspring Village (WS), and Assisted Living (AL). The goal is for the residents to enjoy their lives with independence or, if they do require aid, to feel as safe and secure as possible. At Brightview, the main focus is for most of the residents to live independently and be able to provide for themselves.

Some examples:

- Independent Living (IL): Gives seniors a wonderful home where they receive housekeeping and prepared meals. Seniors have more free time, have access to the shuttle, or can drive their own car with free parking.
- Assisted Living (AL): Encourages independence but still provides help that the residents may need. If the residents have a hard time remembering to take their medication or have a mobility issue, they can get that assistance from the great help the community provides.
- Wellspring Village (WS): Also known as the memory care neighborhood for people who are experiencing Alzheimer's and other forms of Dementia. Residents are encouraged to live independently, particularly in social programs that are tailored to their abilities and interests. All are cared for by the memory care associates.



Internship Project Objective

This project was intended to help identify common patterns, unmet needs, and areas for potential improvement in both individual care practices and systemic support for caregivers.

Related Literature

Before admission, an individual's needs shall be evaluated, and alternative care plans considered. This evaluation should be a joint responsibility of the referring agency or institution, the primary care provider, and the receiving facility. (Mass.gov, 2021)

Massachusetts offers Family Caregiver Support Programs, which offer free counseling, information, education, support, and assistance with the navigation of resources for family and other non-paid caregivers, including caregivers of persons of any age living with dementia. (Mass.gov, 2021)

Provides valuable resources and practical advice for caregivers of individuals with dementia. It offers tips on managing daily challenges, effective communication strategies, and ways to ensure the well-being of both the caregiver and the person living with dementia. (Alzheimers.gov, 2023)

Guidance on understanding and supporting individuals living with dementia. It offers practical advice for caregivers, including strategies for effective communication, managing behavioral changes, and ensuring a supportive environment for those affected by the condition. (Alzheimers.org, 2023)

Informative guide published by the Alzheimer's Society aimed at educating caregivers, family members, and the general public on how to effectively understand, communicate with, and support individuals living with dementia. (Alzheimer's Society, 2022)

Material & Methods

A survey with a mix of closed and open-ended questions was developed focusing on various aspects of caregiving such as:

- The duration and types of care provided
- Assessment of seniors' well-being,
- Involvement of seniors in decision-making processes
- Challenges caregivers face such as communication barriers and emotional distress
- Exploration of strategies used to maintain the well-being of the senior, including physical and cognitive activities, social interactions, and healthcare consultations.
- Inquires about the support systems available to caregivers, such as professional assistance or community resources, providing a comprehensive view of the caregiving experience.
- Designed to gather direct insights from seniors and caregivers regarding decision-making in care.

The survey was given to seniors, caregivers, and healthcare professionals by scanning a QR code, allowing electronic access. Six responses were received.

Living Well with Memory Changes: A Personal Well-Being Survey

How do you assess their well-being daily? (Select all that apply)

- Monitoring mood and emotional state
- Observing physical health (e.g., changes in appetite, sleep patterns)
- Tracking cognitive abilities (e.g., memory, recognition)
- Consulting healthcare providers
- Asking family members or friends for input
- Using a care plan or daily checklist
- Other

What are the primary challenges you face in managing their well-being?

- Communication barriers
- Difficulty in maintaining routines
- Physical health issues (e.g., mobility problems)
- Behavioral issues (e.g., aggression, anxiety)
- Emotional distress or depression
- Lack of support from others
- Others

Do you feel like you can remember the things you need each day?

Yes, most of the time

Sometimes

No, it's hard to remember

I'm not sure

Who helps you the most?

Family

Caregiver

Nurse or doctor

Friend or neighbor

No one helps me much

Other: _____

What makes your day better? (Choose all that apply)

- Being with people
- Listening to music
- Going outside
- Watching TV or movies
- Quiet time
- Doing crafts or activities
- Eating meals I enjoy
- Other: _____

Results

The data shows that a significant number of those providing care highlighted the time-intensive nature of caregiving. In terms of the types of care provided, the majority of caregivers focus on personal care (such as bathing and dressing), medication management, and emotional support, with social activities and household tasks being less common but still important. When assessing the well-being of seniors, caregivers most frequently rely on monitoring mood, physical health, and cognitive abilities. The survey also indicates that communication barriers and behavioral issues are the primary challenges faced by caregivers. Interestingly, most seniors are either somewhat involved or not involved at all in decision-making regarding their care, which emphasizes the heavy reliance on caregivers and healthcare professionals. Furthermore, caregivers need more professional caregiving support, better access to medical care, and additional emotional support. These findings suggest that while caregivers are dedicated and employ a variety of strategies, there is a clear demand for more resources and systemic support to improve the care and well-being of seniors with dementia and Alzheimer's.

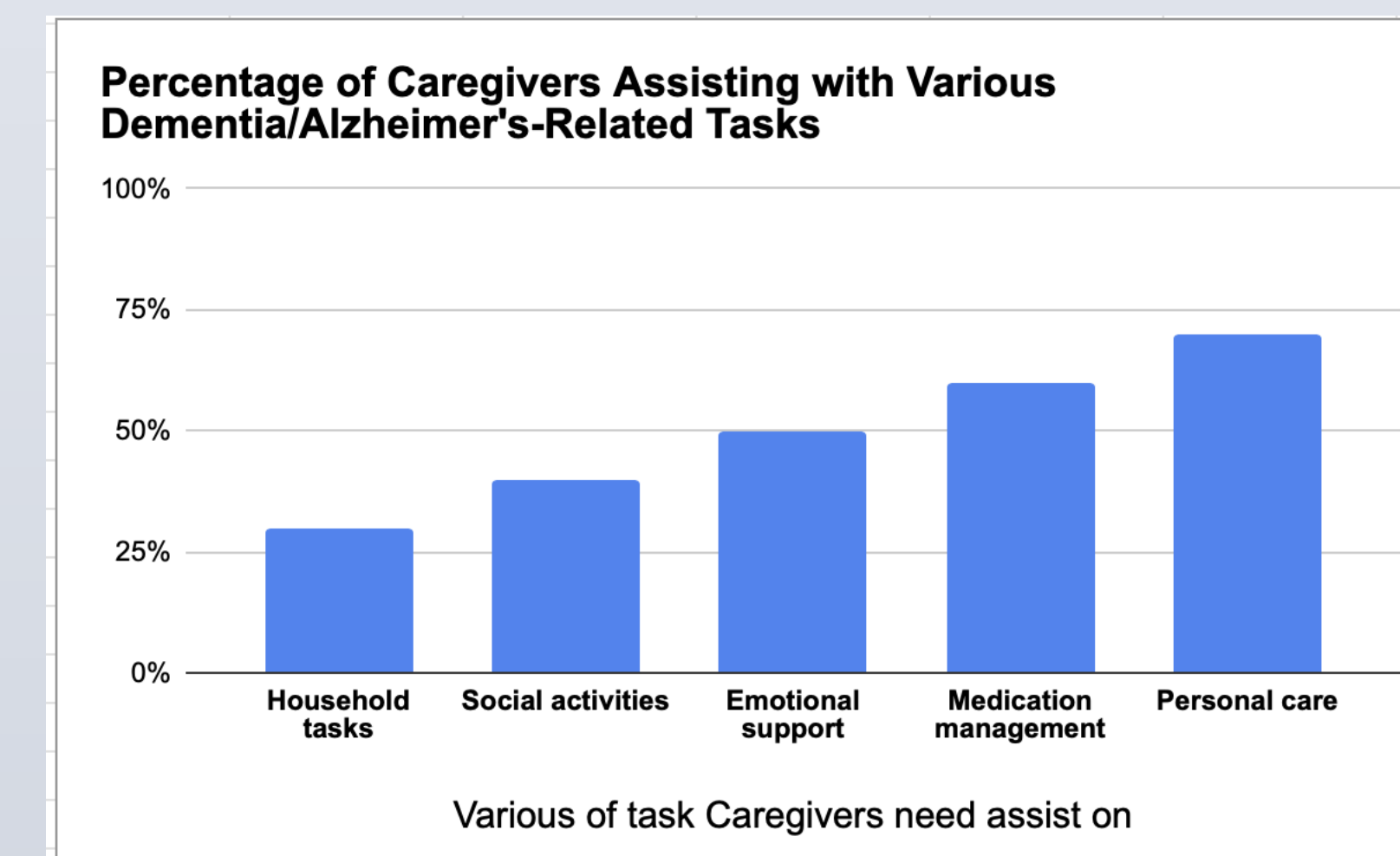
Personal care (e.g., bathing, dressing) is the most common form of support provided by around **70%** of caregivers.

Medication management is next, with about **60%** involvement.

Emotional support follows at around **50%**.

Social activities (e.g., companionship, outings) are supported by **40%**.

Household tasks (e.g., cleaning, cooking) are the least common, with **30%** providing help in this area.



Conclusion

The management of well-being for seniors with dementia and Alzheimer's is a complex and multifaceted process that relies heavily on the involvement of caregivers. The findings from the survey highlight that caregivers play a major role in supporting seniors' physical, emotional, and cognitive needs, often dedicating significant amounts of time each day to their care. Caregivers employ a variety of strategies to maintain the well-being of seniors, such as providing emotional support, engaging in physical and cognitive activities, and seeking professional healthcare guidance. The survey further indicates that while caregivers are dedicated, there is a clear need for additional resources, including professional caregiving support, better access to healthcare, and emotional assistance. This suggests that improving the overall well-being of seniors with dementia and Alzheimer's requires not only caregiver dedication but also a more powerful support system, including healthcare professionals, community resources, and systemic changes to help relieve some of the caregiver's burdens.

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