



#### HUSBAND, FULL-TIME CAREGIVER

As a full-time caregiver for his wife, Rita, Alford Claiborne must help her with all aspects of everyday life at their Encanto home. Rita, who was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease more than a decade ago, is almost completely unresponsive now. Alford cooks all of her meals, spoons food into her mouth, helps her get dressed and takes care of her grooming. "If the roles were reversed, she'd take care of me," he says.

NELVIN C. CEPEDA  
U-T PHOTOS

## CAREGIVERS

### Responsibilities put heavy strain on those providing care to loved ones

FROM SD1  
on the living room couch for more than an hour with her eyes closed, not moving.

He smiles and explains how he pushes through the pain these days, what drives him to dig deep and keep going.

"I feel that right now, if something happened to me, she'd forget all that and get up and take care of me," he says nodding his head.

"If the roles were reversed, she'd take care of me."

#### Crisis situation

Alford Claiborne is one of 650,000 unpaid family caregivers in San Diego County who are taking care of a loved one suffering from disease, brain injury or are simply too frail to care for themselves, county officials estimate.

Those numbers are expected to swell as the baby boom population ages; advocates for caregivers say the impact on American families is nothing short of dire.

"Caregiving is not only a crisis in terms of numbers; on a personal level, it can be devastating," said Lorie Van Tilburg, executive director of the Southern Caregiver Resource Center, a nonprofit support agency located in the Kearny Mesa area.

"In the blink of an eye, a family may be faced with a diagnosis or an injury that will turn its world upside down," she said. "The caregivers' lives no longer are their own, as they provide care to someone who may have very complex medical needs. The stress on caregivers builds up, they don't reach out for help, and isolation becomes their way of life. As a result, caregivers become overwhelmed, depression sets in and their physical health declines."

The all-consuming responsibility of family caregiving disproportionately lands on women, who make up 82 percent of caregivers, according to data compiled by the Southern Caregiver Resource Center.

Daughters make up the largest group of female caregivers, about 44 percent, and the typical caregiver is in her late 40s or early 50s and is often also raising children, putting her in the so-called sandwich generation.

Author Gail Sheehy, who took care of her late husband, magazine editor Clay Felker, called caregiving, "the job nobody applies for." That job, concluded a 2011 national study done by the AARP Public Policy Institute, has an annual economic value of \$450 billion, or about the gross domestic product of Belgium.

The toll on caregivers has been recognized by San Diego County officials, who have made family care one of four components in its Alzheimer's Project, an initiative unveiled in January by county



Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Dianne Jacob. On Tuesday, the board is scheduled to vote on the project's recommendations, which includes expanding services, respite care and support for families dealing with Alzheimer's.

"Eighty percent of Alzheimer's patients are cared for at home by over 150,000 family members in the region," noted the Alzheimer's Project report. "In San Diego County in 2013, these caregivers provided an estimated 156 million hours of unpaid care, valued at nearly \$2 billion. Many caregivers are under so much stress that they struggle to manage their own physical and mental health, at an estimated local cost of \$75 million a year."

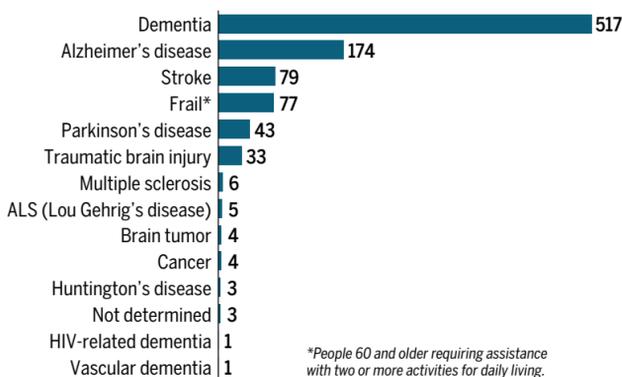
#### Now what?

While a medical diagnosis or tragic accident can instantly turn someone into a caregiver, it often happens without people even realizing it.

Maybe it starts by helping Mom with her groceries or picking up her prescriptions, taking her to

#### Primary diagnosis of care recipients

The following data are a one-year snapshot from July 1, 2013, to June 30, 2014, of 950 Southern Caregiver Resource Center care recipients.



\*People 60 and older requiring assistance with two or more activities for daily living.

Source: Southern Caregiver Resource Center

BETO ALVAREZ • U-T

the doctor and cleaning up after her at home. Then the occasional chore starts becoming a weekly, then a daily task. At a certain point it becomes clear: Mom can't get by without your help.

"We often come across caregiver-

ers who don't identify themselves as caregivers," said Martha Rañón, director of education and outreach for the Southern Caregiver Resource Center, which Rañón first learned about while she was taking care of an aunt with dementia.

**"From the classes, I learned they're always right, don't argue, get into their world as much as you can. I'm in their world, believe me."**

Alford Claiborne