

Do People with Alzheimer's Disease Have the Proper Estate Planning Preparation?

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Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the fifth-leading cause of death in the United States for people aged 65 and older and currently affects more than five million people (Alzheimer's Association, 2016). Estate planning includes legal and financial arrangements to help people diagnosed with AD and their families confront tough questions and prepare for the legal and financial consequences of AD (National Institutes of Health, 2008). This study investigated the estate planning of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (AD) for the presence of (1) a valid will, (2) durable power of attorney for health care, (3) a living will, and (4) life insurance. We analyzed 10,273 adults aged 65 and older from the 2012 Health and Retirement Study using multilevel logistic regression.

We found that a diagnosis of AD, demographic, and socioeconomic characteristics predicted the estate planning variables. Results of multilevel logistic model showed that respondents who had been diagnosed with AD were 185% more likely to assign a durable power of attorney for health care than those without an AD diagnosis. Similarly, respondents who had been diagnosed with AD were 38% more likely to have a written living will than those without an AD diagnosis. In contrast to these overall positive signs of well-prepared estate planning, those with AD were less likely to have life insurance. We found no significant differences on having a valid will between the respondents who had been diagnosed with AD and those who had not. We also found some factors that served as barriers to adequate estate planning regardless of an AD diagnosis. Those who had less estate planning were more likely to be men, African American, Hispanic, to have low incomes, and to have low educational attainment. This latter finding suggests that the lack of existing financial resources and lower education are barriers to appropriate estate planning.

The findings suggest that the onset of an AD diagnosis encourages attainment of critical estate planning needs for individuals and their families, but important barriers exist for people with fewer resources. It has provided empirical support to testimonial evidence that an AD diagnosis leads to assigning durable power of attorney for health care and having a written living will. This research could stimulate public discussions regarding Alzheimer's disease and estate planning and provide reliable information to millions of people affected by AD. Furthermore, policymakers can legislatively apply the findings to help raise awareness of the need for sound estate planning in advance of an AD diagnosis.

References

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