

Testimony of Seth Rogen
Taking a Toll on Families and the Economy: The Rising Cost of Alzheimer's in America

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Moran, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and for the opportunity for me to be called an "expert" at something, because it makes me feel smart.

I should first answer a question I assume many of you are asking, Yes, I'm aware this has nothing to do with the legalization of marijuana. In fact, if you can believe it, this concerns something that I find even more important.

I started dating my wife, Lauren, nine years ago, when her mother was almost 54 years old. The first time I met her parents, being the mensch I am, I was excited to spend time with them and make Lauren think I was the type of guy she should continue dating.

It was this trip, the first time I met my now mother in law, that Lauren first admitted to herself, and then to me, that something was off with her mother. I guess the clues were unfortunately easy to spot since both of Lauren's mother's parents, had Alzheimer's disease. Soon after this trip, at 55 years old, Lauren's mother was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's.

Now, I think at this point, my impression of Alzheimer's was probably what I assume most people's impression is. It was something I thought only really old people got, and I thought that the way the disease primarily showed itself was in the form of forgotten keys, wearing mis-matching shoes, and being asked the same question over and over. This period, which was similar to how I'd seen Alzheimer's displayed movies and TV, lasted a few years for Lauren's mom. After that, however, is when I saw the real ugly truth of the disease. A side I literally had never been exposed to even by hearsay or dramatization.

After forgetting who she and her loved ones were, my mother in law, a teacher for 35 years, then forgot how to speak, feed herself, dress herself, and go the bathroom herself. All by the age of 60.

Lauren's father and a team of caregivers dedicate their lives to letting my mother in law be as comfortable as she can. They would love to do more, but can't, because unlike any of the top 10 causes of death in America, there's currently absolutely no way to prevent, cure, or even slow the progression of Alzheimer's Disease.

Another thing I didn't realize until I was personally effected, was the shame and stigma associated with Alzheimer's. It was before I was born, but I'm told of a time when cancer had a stigma that people were embarrassed by. Celebrities and other public figures that were stricken would hide rather than be voices of hope for people in similar situations. This seems to be where Alzheimer's is today. And it's because of this lack of hope and shameful stigma that my wife, some friends, and myself decided to actually try to do something to change the situation.

We started Hilarity for Charity. Hilarity for Charity is a fund we have as part of the Alzheimer's Association to raise money to help families struggling with Alzheimer's and support cutting edge research.

That's right. The situation is so dire that it caused me, a lazy, self involved, generally self-medicated man-child to start an entire charity organization. It was through this we felt that we weren't just complaining there was nothing to be done, but actively taking steps to do something. Instead of being disappointed that young people were so misinformed about the reality of the disease, we've started to educate them.

We recently started a college program that allows university students to hold their own Hilarity For Charity events, and in the month since it started, eighteen schools nationwide have signed up to hold events. The fact that we got students to volunteer their time is a huge accomplishment; especially considering both X-BOX ONE and PlayStation 4 both came out this year.

I came here today for a few reasons:

One: this is a super cool story, and I'm a huge House of Cards fan.

Two is to say, people need more help. I've personally seen the massive amount of financial strain this disease causes, and if the American people ever decide to reject genitalia driven comedy, I would no longer be able to afford it. Therefore, I can't begin to imagine how people with more limited incomes are dealing with this. Studies show that Alzheimer's and related dementia is the most costly condition in the United States. Yes. It's more costly than heart disease in a country where for a dollar and twenty-nine cents, you can get a taco made out of Doritos.

While deaths from other major diseases like Heart disease, HIV, and Strokes continue to decline, deaths from Alzheimer's have increased almost 70 percent in the last fifteen years. Over five million Americans have Alzheimer's and at this rate, in 35 years, as many as 16 million will have the disease.

The third reason I'm here, simply, is to show people they're not alone. So few people share their personal stories, so few people have something to relate to, I know that if me and my wife saw somebody like me talking about this, we would feel less alone.

Americans whisper the word Alzheimer's because their government whispers the word Alzheimer's. And although a whisper is better than the silence that the Alzheimer's community has been facing for decades, it's still not enough. It needs to be yelled and screamed to the point that it finally gets the attention and the funding it deserves and needs, if for no other reason than to get some peace and quiet.

People look to their government for hope, and I ask that when it comes to Alzheimer's disease, you continue to take more steps to provide even more.

I would like to thank the Committee again for the opportunity to share my story and to voice my wholehearted support for continuing the work that pursues a cure for Alzheimer's disease.