

Speaking Notes – May 28, 2007

Dale Goldhawk, President, Alzheimer Society of Canada

As the volunteer President of the Alzheimer Society of Canada, I would like to thank you for your invitation to appear here today.

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation for the important work you are undertaking on behalf of Canadians.

We are very pleased to be part of the ongoing deliberations of this committee, and would like to take the next few minutes to talk to you about the effects of Alzheimer’s disease on an aging Canadian population.

This disease, by its very nature, slowly destroys memory and reasoning, erodes independence and leads to the need for increased levels of caregiving and family support.

It attacks the very attributes that define us as autonomous, functioning people, eventually affecting all aspects of a person’s life, including how they think, feel, act and react to their environment.

This is a deadly condition – none are cured, and none survive.

Throughout the course of the disease, it puts individuals in a very vulnerable state, leaving them at an increased risk for abuse, neglect and economic hardship.

Alzheimer’s disease is an illness that attacks without prejudice. It strikes out at rich and poor alike, and it claims victims from all walks of life. It affects more women than men, and most caregivers are women.

Seniors that your committee has already deemed at risk, including older women, unattached seniors (of which almost three quarters of them are women) and immigrant seniors, become even more vulnerable following a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s.

Many people diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease are already struggling with other chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease or hypertension, complicating treatment and further compromising their economic and physical wellbeing. Also, almost all people with Down’s syndrome who survive into their 40’s will develop Alzheimer’s.

As your committee works to further define what a senior is, we at the Society are also faced with this same issue. Alzheimer’s disease doesn’t just strike down those over the age of 65. With an increased knowledge and awareness of the disease, people are now starting to be

diagnosed as early as 50, and certainly in their early 60s. As you can imagine, the economic and health sector ramifications from this are enormous.

What does all of this mean to us as Canadians? What does this mean to the Government of Canada as they struggle to understand the changing landscape of this country's demographics?

For that, I turn the floor over to Scott Dudgeon, CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Canada.