



## Shining New Light on the Brain

*“I do believe we currently have the cure for Alzheimer’s disease in someone’s test tube.”*  
- Dr. Reisa Sperling

This rather incredible statement might seem wishful thinking if it were not uttered by a world leading research expert currently working to find a cure for Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias (ADRD).

Dr. Reisa Sperling is a neurologist, specializing in dementia and imaging research, a Professor in Neurology at Harvard Medical School, Director of the Center for Alzheimer Research and Treatment at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, and the Director of the Neuroimaging Core and the Outreach Core of the Massachusetts Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center at Massachusetts General Hospital.

These are rarified credentials, but Dr. Sperling’s interest in ADRD was sparked by circumstances all too familiar to millions of people around the world: the tragic decline of her brilliant and beloved grandfather.

For more than 25 years, prevailing wisdom has lead ADRD researchers to focus on the build-up of the



*Dr. Reisa Sperling*

protein beta-amyloid in the memory forming regions of the brain as the primary culprit in causing Alzheimer’s disease. Destructive plaques and tangles form as a result of the accumulation of beta-amyloid in the brain. Neurons malfunction, the brain begins to atrophy and dementia ensues. The rather clear-cut goal of leading researchers has been to experiment with different compounds that would “flush” or “clear” the beta-amyloid build up.

A perpetual stumbling block in the quest for a cure is the hard fact that the right drug must be administered at the right time. The “right time” is before plaque and tangles do irreparable damage to the brain. Again, in the words of Dr. Sperling: “What keeps me up at night, what most worries me is that we are testing these drugs too late in the disease. Once a person already has mild dementia the chances that we can rescue that brain – even with a terrific drug – are very small. We are going to have a better chance as we move earlier in the disease. We need

*See page 4, Light*

## In-Home, With Love A Family Caregiver's Story

The story of any one family caregiver is as unique as any one person. Yet many caregivers share a sense of gratitude, satisfaction and wisdom gained. Sacrifice, dedication, sorrow, joy, love – the ties that bind family are always tested and often strengthened in times of crisis.

The role of family caregiver can be thrust unexpectedly upon a person and the learning curve can be steep. Most important for the health and happiness of all involved is the fundamental realization that family caregivers should not, and need not, be alone in their efforts to preserve the highest quality of life possible for their loved ones.

In speaking of her husband’s recent passing, Shawna Kirkpatrick sounds warm, thoughtful and vibrant as she takes in a beautiful summer day in Homer.

Her years as caregiver to her husband Pat were ones marked by joys, sorrows, challenges and triumphs, fatigue and relief. But the word Shawna uses most often in speaking of her time caring for Pat through his years of living with Parkinson’s

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## Letter From The Executive Director

Greetings,

CNN recently aired a heartfelt and intelligent documentary chronicling the life of country music legend Glen Campbell and his family, as they experience trials that are all too familiar to those living with Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias (ADRD). The widely acclaimed documentary, *I'll Be Me*, has raised awareness of the inherent complexities and difficulties in living with the disease. Watching Glenn Campbell's family caregivers ensure for him the highest possible quality of life will strike a familiar chord for all who have sought to do the same in support of their loved one.



Families and individuals need our support here in Alaska. At Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska, we measure our success by the individual lives affected through ensuring the highest possible quality of life for those living with ADRD. Family caregivers might seem tireless, but they are not. We often help them find a few hours to themselves. Professional caregivers in rural Alaska might want to further their expertise and level of caregiving. We provide remote classes and webinars. A beleaguered family member might be lost in a blizzard of paperwork and tangle of service providers. Our skilled Care Coordinators forge ahead and find solutions, where before there was mounting frustration. We strive to make certain that Alaskans caring for our frailest elders know that they are not alone. Your continued support enables us to fulfill this mission.

The recent success of our *Amblin' for Alzheimer's* event at the Anchorage Golf Course, is a great example of Alaskans supporting Alaskans living with ADRD. In capital terms, more than fifty thousand dollars were raised. But more important than any particular dollar tally, is the number of people who walked in unity, drew strength from one another and shared personal stories. *I'll Be Me* is essentially another of these shared personal stories, but it also touches upon a frustrating fact known to many Alaskans: not enough capital goes toward the research and technology that promises to bring us closer to a cure for ADRD. Recent strides toward understanding ADRD, understanding how to combat it - and in understanding the human brain as a whole - are proving to be as incredible as they are hopeful. Still, these breakthroughs are not enough.

The truth is that those living with Alzheimer's today will be the source of tomorrow's cure. The energy, devotion, determination and support of people like you are the best hope for those living with ADRD today and those who will face it in the future. Human capital continues to be our greatest asset no matter the season. We thank you for your support and look forward to meeting the challenges of the 2016 fiscal year with hope, enthusiasm and determination.

Best Regards,

Karl Garber

## **Light** *(from page 1)*

to reach the brain with mild cognitive impairment, or even normal people who show the earliest changes in the brain.” This poses a medical puzzle as researchers must identify individuals with ADRD before the symptoms of ADRD are readily apparent – to “see” inside the brain in search of a future disease.

Both in terms of early detection of ADRD and the development of drugs to combat the disease, there is no more important tool than brain imaging. It used to be the case that a definitive diagnosis of ADRD was not possible during life – plaques and tangles were identified only by way of autopsy.

Today, clinicians, researchers and physicians have at their disposal a battery of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), positron emission tomography (PET scans), functional MRI (fMRI), the Sci-Fi seeming branch of neuroscience known as optogenetics and a process known as CLARITY. The latter is used to render cadaver brains entirely transparent, except for the exquisite architecture of cells and nerve fibers - the entirety of the brain’s “network”.

Building on more than thirty years of images gained from MRI and PET scans, researchers like Dr. Sperling are able to use the newer fMRI to put a living subject’s brain through “stress” tests and “watch” the brain react in real time. The subject performs memory tasks while the fMRI records which areas of the brain “light up” during the course of

memory formation.

When compared to that of a normally functioning brain, fMRI’s can pinpoint areas of abnormal activity within the brain of a person who otherwise shows no outward symptoms of ADRD. fMRI’s can act as a roadmap toward finding the general area of a broken network connection within the brain. Another researcher might use this roadmap to then take a CLARITY rendered transparent brain to examine the exact neural pathways that come in to play within this pinpointed area of the human brain.

Knowing the where and the how of the brain’s “wiring” is fundamental in the development of drugs that might combat or cure ADRD. Dr. Sperling and others envision a cure that may be as simple as a beta-amyloid/plaque fighting additive to the water supply or even a vaccine administered to adults. And it might turn out that drugs are only part of the solution.

Neurosurgeons are currently stimulating specific neurons with infrared light in the treatment of depression. There is a good deal of hope that this optogenetic technology might also be effective in the treatment of Alzheimer’s disease – literally a shining of light on the brain.

The astonishing advancements in the field of brain imaging have brought us tantalizingly close to major breakthroughs in the treatment of ADRD, but we are not quite there yet.

The painful truth is that a cure depends most heavily on financial investment and those who might not enjoy the benefits of a cure - those living with ADRD today.

Again, Dr. Sperling: “Unfortunately, slow enrollment in clinical trials is the bottleneck for Alzheimer’s clinical research. People need to volunteer, not just for themselves, but for their children and their grandchildren. We need everyone’s help in order to make Alzheimer’s disease a preventable illness.”

More than twenty other nations have joined the United States in claiming 2025 as the year by which we will cure or prevent ADRD. With so much time, energy, money and hope invested in the urgent technologies of today, it is instructive to recall the wisdom of Bill Gates. “We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next ten.”

### **Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska**



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## In-Home (from page 1)

disease is: family.

Melvin “Pat” Kirkpatrick was the lucky sort of man who took great pleasure in both his profession as a physician’s assistant (PA) and in embracing life outside the office.

As Shawna tells it, they were the sort of young couple who loved nothing more than getting out under the western skies and exploring the abundant splendor that their home states of Idaho and Utah had to offer. Still, it came as no real surprise to Shawna when, in 1974, Pat suggested pulling up stakes and fulfilling a lifelong dream. It was only a matter of time before, as the classic Johnny Horton song goes, it was “North! To Alaska”.

Pat and Shawna were trading up in terms of rivers, mountains and wide open country. But Alaska improved itself in luring the couple north. At the time they settled in Palmer, there were a grand total of three practicing physicians in the entire Mat-Su Valley. A capable PA was a welcome addition to the community.

In the years to come, Shawna would go on to work as a medical assistant, only after establishing herself as a homemaker and mother to six young Alaskans. The Kirkpatrick’s were, and are, here to stay.

Parkinson’s Disease, Shawna explains, is not a static disease – some days new problems crop up, just as old ones disappear, or reappear. Pat died in April of this year after living with Parkinson’s for more than a decade. As Shawna put it, “Parkinson’s disease doesn’t kill you, you die with it.”

The last six months of his life were difficult and Shawna describes his eventual passing as a blessing. Pat



*Shawna and Pat Kirkpatrick*

had been living with Parkinson’s for some time before he retired in 2005. The disease affects the volume at which a person can speak and he was finding it more and more difficult to communicate with his patients. He and Shawna continued to enjoy the outdoors, travel and remain as active as possible – even as she began to gradually assume responsibility for Pat’s caregiving needs. Bathing, feeding, cleaning, dressing, and repeat. Every day.

Shawna is four years younger than Pat and she felt physically up to the task of caring for him. But as she says, “the more and more and more process of caregiving is gradual,” and eventually it was more than Shawna could handle on her own. Pat was no longer able to be left alone and the Kirkpatrick children had been a great help, but it was time for outside assistance.

A bumpy previous experience with caregivers who were not a great fit made Shawna a bit wary to reach out. When Pat was still working, he would often refer his own frail elder patients to the Alzheimer’s Resource of Alaska office in Palmer. Shawna followed suit and made a call.

In-Home Service Specialists Gail Spence and Jennifer Charvet rely on a tried and true method to improve the lives of their clients: they listen. In-Home Service Workers Yelena Natekina and Nancy Hendricks were matched to the Kirkpatrick’s and quickly became an integral part of Pat’s care.

It was not merely by virtue of performing respite and chore services that the two women made themselves invaluable. Shawna credits Nancy and Yelena’s profound kindness, real compassion and expertise as a crucial source of support to the entire extended Kirkpatrick family. “The emotional support Gail, Jennifer, Yelena and Nancy provided, truly, made them friends to the family.”

Shawna’s daughter Tammy and her grandchildren Hiram and Hailee moved in with the Kirkpatrick’s to help care for Pat during his final months. Pat was non-verbal, but those who knew him best were still able to communicate with him, anticipate and meet his needs.

Shawna now lives with Tammy and her family and has embarked on a new chapter of her life. No longer a caregiver, she is still getting used to the freedom of doing things like catching a movie on a whim (she gives *Jurassic World* a thumbs up.) Independent and active, Shawna lives with Tammy and her grandchildren in Homer now and takes great comfort in being surrounded by those who look upon her with kindness and love. Just like Pat did.



## **SAVE THE DATES!**

More Details to follow  
Check [AlzAlaska.org](http://AlzAlaska.org) for updates.



**35+ Singles Dance and Benefit  
Saturday, September 19th**

**Wine Tasting and Fundraiser  
Saturday, November 7th**



We would like to thank our generous sponsors of the 11th annual Amblin' for Alzheimer's held in May. With your contributions, the event raised more than \$54,000 for our programs and services.

The funds raised have a tremendous impact on our seniors and their families. One of our attendees, Mable, shared with us this wonderful quote: "Our family couldn't keep taking care of dad without your kind care and assistance. We couldn't pay for all of the wonderful help we received recently, thank you for being a life raft for our family and having this walk to make it better for all of us who need your help!"

Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska could not do what we do without the generous commitment of a caring community. Thank you again for your thoughtful support of Amblin'. We look forward to Amblin' with you again on May 7, 2016.

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**April 1st to June 30th**





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1750 Abbott Road, 561-3313

### **ABC Presentations**

#### **Medicaid Waiver**

Monday, 9/14/15  
10-11:30AM or 5:30-7:00PM  
Contact: Jane Haiar

#### **Mouthcare Without the Battle**

Monday 9/21/15  
10-11:30AM or 5:30-7:00PM  
Contact: Kim Jung

#### **Making Visits Positive**

Monday, 9/28/15  
10-11:30AM or 5:30-7PM  
Contact: Debbie Chulick

#### **Savvy Caregiver For Families**

Wednesdays for 6 Weeks  
9/2-10/6, 5:30-7:30PM  
Contact: Debbie Chulick  
Free, Registration Required

#### **Savvy Professional**

Wednesday, 9/30, 9:00-4:00PM  
Contact: Jane Haiar

#### **Mind Matters**

Screening Required  
Wednesdays, 8/5-9/23  
10:00-11:30AM

#### **Brain Works**

Screening Required  
Wednesdays, 8/5-9/23  
10:00-11:30AM

#### **Art Links**

Fridays, 11:00-12:00PM

## **COPPER RIVER**

Contact: Gay Wellman at 822-5620

#### **Brain Fitness "Senior Scribblers"**

Glennallen Senior Center.  
Last Thursday of Month, 1-2:00PM

#### **Brain Games**

Valdez Senior Center  
Tues, 7/28 & 9/29, 12:30-2:30PM

## **JUNEAU**

3225 Hospital Drive, 586-6044

### **ABC Presentations**

#### **Making Visits Positive**

Wednesday, 7/22  
12:00-2:00PM

#### **Meaningful Activities & Purposeful Days**

Wednesday, 8/26  
12:00-2:00PM

#### **Family Meeting**

Wednesday, 9/23  
12:00-2:00PM

#### **Savvy Caregiver For Families**

Mondays for 6 Weeks  
9/14-10/19, 5:30-7:30  
Free, Registration Required

#### **Art Links**

Thursdays, 10:30-11:30AM

Contact: Amber Smith for all classes

## **FAIRBANKS**

565 University Ave., # 2, 452-2277

### **ABC Presentations**

#### **When Does Forgetting Become a Disease?**

Tuesday, 9/22, 5:30-7:00PM

#### **Mind Matters**

Screening Required  
Thursdays, 7/2-8/20 & 9/10-10/29  
1:00-2:30PM

#### **Art Links**

Thursdays 11:00AM-12:00PM

#### **GO4LIFE: Everyday Exercise**

Tuesday - 8/18, 5:30-7:00PM

#### **Virtual Dementia Tour**

Tuesday, 8/25, 10:00AM-5:00PM  
Free, Registration Required

#### **Savvy Caregiver**

Wednesdays, 9/16-10/21  
5:30-7:30PM

Contact Joan Adams for all classes

## **MAT SU VALLEY**

10355 E. Palmer Wasilla Hwy., 746-3413

### **ABC Presentations**

#### **Future Planning: Advance Directives/ Powers of Attorney**

Tuesday, 8/11, 1:00-2:30PM

#### **Medicaid Waiver**

Monday, 9/21  
12:00-1:30PM or 6:00-7:30PM

#### **Savvy Caregiver For Families**

Coming in October  
Free, Registration Required

#### **Art Links**

Fridays 1:00-2:00PM

#### **Mind Matters**

Screening Required  
Wednesdays, 8/5-9/23  
10:30AM - Noon

Contact Linda Shepard for all classes

## **PROFESSIONAL WEBINARS**

Amber: 586-6044, [asmith@alzalaska.org](mailto:asmith@alzalaska.org)

#### **Meaningful Activities & Purposeful Days**

Tuesday, 7/28  
12:00-1:00PM

#### **"Personhood" & Person Centered Care**

Tuesday, 8/25  
12:00-1:00PM

#### **The Dementias**

Tuesday, 9/29  
12:00-1:00PM

## **Family Caregiver Webinars**

Gay 822-5620, [gwellman@alzalaska.org](mailto:gwellman@alzalaska.org)

#### **Meaningful Activities & Purposeful Days**

Thursday, 8/13, 7:00-8:30PM

#### **Healthy Body, Healthy Brain**

Thursday, 9/10, 7:00-8:30PM

#### **Online Savvy Caregiver**

Tuesdays, 9/15-10/20, 2:00-4:00PM



## Support Groups around the state

A safe place for caregivers, family and friends of persons with dementia to share experiences and solutions.

### Statewide Telephone Support Group

Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska	Caregiver	1st and 3rd Wednesday 2-3 PM Dial in 1-877-216-1555, Code 927989	Gay Wellman 822-5620 or (800) 478-1080 x6
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### Anchorage

Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska 1750 Abbott Rd.	Caregiver Caregiver	2nd Thursday 4th Thursday	12PM-1:30PM 5:30-7:00 PM	Debbie Chulick 561-3313
Chester Park Cooperative 2020 Muldoon Rd.	Caregiver	3rd Friday	10 -11:30 AM	Kim Jung 561-3313

### Eagle River

Holy Spirit Episcopal Church 17545 N. Eagle River Loop Rd.	Caregiver	2nd Thursday	6:30-8:00 PM	Linda Shepard 746-3413
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### Fairbanks

Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska 565 University Ave. Suite 2	Caregiver	1st & 3rd Tuesday 2nd Tuesday	11:30-1:00PM 5:30-7:00PM	Joan Adams 452-2277
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### Homer

Friendship Center	Caregiver	2 Thursday's a month	2:30PM-3:30PM	Mary Jo 235-2295
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### Juneau

Southeast Senior Services 419 Sixth Street	Caregiver	Call for more information		463-6177 or (866)746-6177
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### Ketchikan

Ketchikan Senior Center Upper Level	Caregiver	Call for more information		Bernice 225-8080
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### Kodiak

Kodiak Senior Center 302 Erskine Ave.	Caregiver	4th Thursday	12:30-1:30 PM	486-6181
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### Mat-Su Valley

Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska Trinity Barn Plaza Mile 2.2 Palmer-Wasilla Hwy.	Caregiver	2nd Wednesday	1-2:30 PM	Linda Shepard 746-3413
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### Seward

Seward Senior Center	Caregiver	4th Thursday	1-2 PM	262-1280 or (800) 776-8210
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### Sitka

Brave Heart Volunteers 120 Katlian Street	Caregiver	Call for more info.		747-4600 Krisanne
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### Soldotna

Soldotna Senior Center	Caregiver	2nd & Last Tuesday	1-3 PM	262-1280 or (800) 776-8210
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### Sterling

Sterling Senior Center	Caregiver	1st Tuesday	1-2 PM	262-6808
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Anchorage, AK 99507

## **Support Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska through your workplace!**

Workplace giving makes supporting Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska easy for you and helps us provide sustaining support and services to frail elders and their families across Alaska.

You can contribute to us through any workplace contribution program like the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC# 52943), Alaska Community Share or United Way. If Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska is not included in your campaign list, include us in the "other" selection of your list.

Many employers offer matching gift programs, check with your Human Resources department to double your support of our work.