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Baltimore woman helps educate African Americans about the increased threat of Alzheimer's disease they face

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Alzheimer's disease can start with something as simple as misplacing items or having difficulty completing daily tasks.

Marlyn Taylor, family care coordinator with the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland Chapter, knows the signs of the disease. In fact, this month she will host a virtual session to educate the public — especially Black people — about how to spot the 10 signs of Alzheimer's.

[African Americans are twice as likely to](#) develop the disease as white people, according to the organization's data.

Taylor, whose focus is outreach to the African American community, hasn't always worked to educate the public about the disease. Until 2015, she had not even heard of the association. An internship with the Baltimore County Department of Aging led her to work with the association.

"I wanted to be in a position where I could help, reach out," Taylor said. "No one in my family has dementia. But just seeing what was needed concerning Alzheimer's disease, which is a horrible disease, inspired me. I could see the mission and the vision of the association."

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More than 5 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's. And one in three seniors die from Alzheimer's, according to the association.

Taylor said one reason she was attracted to working with the organization is because of the disease's prognosis. Currently there is not a known cure.

“All of these diseases have this cure and that cure, and they can prolong life. With Alzheimer's all it does is progress,” she said. “This is where I can do some good. This is where I can help.”



As Family Care coordinator with the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland Chapter, Marlyn Taylor is helping to educate African Americans about the disease which affects them at twice the amount as white people. (Courtesy of Renee A Johnson)

Taylor organizes regular virtual chats, directing caregivers to resources such as 24-hour hotlines, and works with Black churches and other groups. Her work with the African Methodist Episcopal Church is part of a three-year partnership to educate more than 2 million U.S.-based AME church members.

Taylor explained that African Americans are more susceptible to the disease and other forms of dementia because of their higher rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which have been linked to Alzheimer's.

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“When [Black people] are diagnosed, it is typically in a later stage of the disease,” she said. “They need more medical care. That should not be. That is one of those social injustices and the systemic racism that affects the African American community — not knowing what resources are in their community for them.”

Taylor's role is an important one in helping to mend years of distrust between marginalized groups and the medical industry, according to Ilene Rosenthal, the association's program director.

“Historically they have been underserved,” Rosenthal explained. “We are trying very hard to be seen as a trusted resource for these communities.”

Rosenthal points to the annual [Pythias A. and Virginia I. Jones African American Community Forum on Memory Loss](#) that Taylor leads, which attracts 400 participants each year. In November and December, Taylor led four virtual sessions of the forum, attracting an average of 125 people each session.

In addition to the outreach efforts, Taylor also oversees follow-up with all incoming calls with the association's 24-hour helpline for caregivers and family members.

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The association provides “that personal touch for families,” Rosenthal said. “It is a very challenging disease and a hard diagnosis to give. She helps them move forward. She shows them how to plan ahead.”

Georgia Dickens said her life has become much easier since meeting Taylor in July. Dickens, a Baltimore City resident, has been caring for her 87-year-old

mother since 2015. She said that within two weeks of meeting with Taylor, she received grant assistance to purchase items to better care for her mother.

“She has become more frail,” Dickens said. “Those medical equipment items are helping to make sure that Mom is more mobile. Getting her out [of the house] is important.”

She said Taylor and the association have been helpful every step of the way.

“I’m walking with my mom to her sunset. Miss Taylor is there with me. With her knowledge and resources, it certainly takes a village to care for someone with Alzheimer’s and dementia. I appreciate that very much,” she said.

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Taylor, who worked as the head of technical services in Bard Library for Baltimore City Community College, switched careers a decade ago following the death of her husband, Darnell Taylor. She decided to pursue her master’s degree in social work at Salisbury University.

She said she always had an affinity for helping older people. It started with her late mother, she said.

“I have always had a connection with the older community and population — even as a young girl,” she said. “My mother always had this helping hand with the community. It affected me. I wanted to be of help. I wanted to make a difference, even if it was giving a smile or holding a hand. It’s always been in me.”

This article is part of our Newsmaker series that profiles notable people in the Baltimore region who are having an impact in our diverse communities. If you’d like to suggest someone who should be profiled, please send their name and a short description of what they are doing to make a difference to: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Editor, Sundra Hominik at shominik@baltsun.com.