A March 2014 study by Rush University Medical Center warns that as many as half a million people die from Alzheimer's disease each year, six times what was previously thought. The report also urges more accuracy in filing death certificates.

**Keywords**
Dementia, Alzheimer's Disease, Death, Rate, Report, Rush University Medical Center, Study, Research, Allan Levey, Emory University, Death Certificate, Cause of Death, Inaccurate, Misinformation, Information, Data, Accuracy, Discrepancy, Fatal, Fatalities, Funding, Resources, Public Resources, Cure, Cause, Awareness, Family, Families, Charlie Schaffer, Harriet Schaffer, Alzheimer's Association, Cancer, Diabetes, AIDS, Heart Disease, Alzheimer's, Health Research, Health, Wellness

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Transcript

Alzheimer's Disease Deaths Higher Than Previously Though

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor: Back as promised, with new numbers on Alzheimer's disease now responsible for many more deaths than anyone thought at first, rivaling cancer and heart disease, in fact, the news could have big implications in the search for a cure. We get more on this tonight from our Chief Medical Editor Doctor Nancy Snyderman.

CHARLIE SCHAFFER: Hey, Harriet, come get on the sofa with us.

DR. NANCY SNYDERMAN, reporting:

Today's study could impact the 5 million people living with Alzheimer's and their families.

C. SCHAFFER: And a hug.

DR. SNYDERMAN: The Rush University Medical Center report suggests the actual number of deaths each year from Alzheimer's disease may be as many as half a million, that's six times more than the 83,000 currently reported. Why the discrepancy? Because death certificates are notoriously inaccurate, focusing on only the immediate cause of death.

DR. ALLAN LEVEY (Emory University): Pneumonia, urinary tract infection, heart attack, you know, those are things that are obvious to people when somebody dies and that's what a doctor will frequently list on the death certificate as the cause of death.

DR. SNYDERMAN: Today's report could have major implications for funding of Alzheimer's research which currently lags way behind diseases like diabetes, heart disease, AIDS, and cancer. The Alzheimer's Association says this new study highlights that Alzheimer's is a fatal disease and it is important for guiding the allocation of public resources. Today's study matters a lot to the Schaffer family.

C. SCHAFFER: I love this one.

DR. SNYDERMAN: Married 50 years, Charlie and his wife, Harriet, have three kids, and nine grandkids, and now a new challenge.

C. SCHAFFER: Well, I have been diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment.

DR. SNYDERMAN: They're worried Alzheimer's runs in the family. Charlie's mother Charlotte died at
age 91, and the family suspects the real cause was Alzheimer's disease.
HARRIET SCHAFFER: She would ask a lot of questions over and over. And they never actually did an autopsy or anything, but we all knew it was Alzheimer's.
DR. SNYDERMAN: So while this lifelong athlete--
C. SCHAFFER: Houston.
DR. SNYDERMAN: --still has game--
C. SCHAFFER: Way to go Danny.
DR. SNYDERMAN: --he is focused on raising funds and awareness for Alzheimer's research to hopefully spare his family from this awful disease.
C. SCHAFFER: I don't want my children to have this. And I don't want my grandchildren to have this. Way to go David. Way to go Houston.
DR. SNYDERMAN: These numbers are a game-changer with regard to the significance of Alzheimer's disease and reinforce just how important it is to collect data in the right way, and a reminder that death certificates should be as accurate and hold as much significance as a birth certificate. And that's a gap that we have not yet bridged. Brian.
WILLIAMS: Anecdotally, a lot of us thought it was worse than some of the numbers we're reporting. So this is proof of that. Nancy, thank you as always.
DR. SNYDERMAN: You bet, Brian.