

A Tribute to Mother's

ONE FAMILY'S JOURNEY WITH ALZHEIMER'S



**Kieran McAvoy, MD
Brookfield**

This Mother's Day we honor all mothers who are on a journey with Alzheimer's. For Dr. Kieran McAvoy, Brookfield, Mother's Day is particularly emotional this year. Kieran's mother, Jackie, is living with Alzheimer's and Kieran had her first child, Eimear Faith, in April 2022.

An Empowering Role Model: Reach for the Stars

"My mom is my best friend," Kieran shared. "She is a unique character: she has never been afraid to be herself and create her own path. She was an ER nurse before she had her five kids. She always empowered me to not simply follow the crowd and encouraged me to be myself. She inspired me to reach for the stars and never settle for anything less."

"As I was pregnant for the first time, it was hard," Kieran shared. "You have visions of going through these milestones in life with your mom at your side and she's not there in the same way. Alzheimer's robbed us of that."

Easy to Miss the Signs

"Looking back, it was very easy to miss the signs of my mom's condition," Kieran said. "Originally, I noticed that when I would visit her on the weekends during college, her bills weren't being paid. The whole family thought it was just due to stress and letting things fall between the cracks. She was, after all, only in her late 50s. A couple years later as a medical student, I learned about dementia. That's when I realized that my mom was checking a lot of the boxes for this condition. I also learned how to do a Mini-Cog™ test, so I had my mom do it, and she couldn't pass it." A Mini-Cog test is a tool for seeing if someone is showing signs of dementia. It's a very brief test including a three-word recall test and a clock drawing test. Jackie was officially diagnosed with Alzheimer's at the age of 64.



A Network for Support

"I was in my 20's when my mom was first diagnosed- it was very sad and isolating," Kieran shared. "The neurologist referred us to the Alzheimer's Association through the Direct Connect referral program. I reached out to the staff and I was connected the Young Champions program. Through this I met other families dealing with early-onset Alzheimer's. It was so nice to have these connections and know that I wasn't alone. I also got connected with the Purple Canoe Club, which is a Milwaukee social and support group of friends and family facing the challenges of Alzheimer's and dementia. They have been a valuable resource as well."

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Kieran has also been involved in Advocacy efforts for the Alzheimer's Association. "I went to Washington D.C. for an Advocacy Day to raise awareness for Alzheimer's legislation. It was an incredible experience. I shared about my family's personal journey so legislators could see why funding for research and expansion of support services for those with younger onset was so important."

Kieran is also a committee member for the Walk to End Alzheimer's® and walks on a team, Alz You Need is Love, with the Medical College of Wisconsin's Geriatrics Department.

A Calling to the field of Geriatrics

Kieran is an Internal Medicine Resident Physician at the Medical College of Wisconsin and later this summer will begin her geriatric fellowship there. "I originally didn't plan to go into geriatrics," Kieran said. "But my mom's Alzheimer's journey motivated me. I want to take care of people like my mom." In Wisconsin, there are currently only 83 geriatricians. The number of geriatricians needed by 2050 to serve just 10% of those 65 and older is 273. This workforce shortage presents a further barrier to early diagnosis.

Women are at the center of Alzheimer's and dementia, with two-thirds of American's living with Alzheimer's being women. On Mother's Day as we celebrate mothers, aunts and grandmothers, we are reminded of the importance of education and early diagnosis for those most significantly impacted.

