

Four Seasons CEO Shares Five Common Ways Families Know When it's Time to Ask for Care Assistance for Aging Loved Ones

FLAT ROCK, N.C., Jan. 2, 2014 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – As the holiday season draws to a close and families return home to resume work and school, the days following Christmas are frequently a time when the question of how to cope with an aging loved one's long term illness is no longer a concern for the future. "January is often the time when family members reassess the amount and quality of care they can give, versus what Grandma or Grandpa needs," says Chris Comeaux, Four Seasons Compassion for Life.

Each family's situation drives home the increasingly significant question of how individuals in the wider Buncombe County metropolitan statistical area cope with the realities of long term illness and dying.

For individuals like Marie Thompson of Hendersonville, the issue is up close and personal. Her husband, Russell, 83, has multiple sclerosis. A 30 year veteran of General Electric, he is now totally paralyzed on the right with limited ability to walk and stand. The vital man Marie married now depends on an electric wheel chair to move from room to room in their home.

"He can dress himself, I put on his shoes and socks," she says. "He needs so much assistance, he can't do for himself. He would never be able to manage his medicines, fix or get his own food. He's not safe to leave in a place without somebody there. MS is very debilitating."

If Russell falls, she calls the fire department for assistance to help lift him. And getting him in and out of a car into a fold up wheel chair for medical appointments is impossible.

Former nurse, Marie Thompson figures she's better off than most when it comes to navigating the additional complications of her husband's excruciating ruptured disc and surgery, physical therapy, edema, and the aftermath of congestive heart failure.

"I did know what types of options were available, probably more than a lay person would," she says. "For example, medications and how to give them, things like that, I already knew."

Still, when Russell's doctor saw that Marie was having such a difficult time managing, he told the couple he'd like to refer them to hospice. Now, instead of traveling to care providers, the care providers come to their home.

The assistance from hospice was a "tremendous relief," Marie says, as it helps her manage better emotionally, physically, and financially. Instead of

Russell remaining at home, the other options would include a long term care facility their insurance wouldn't cover, finding an assisted living place, or divesting themselves of their home and assets.

"People are very kind and they offer to help, but then you don't know if they mean it, or you feel guilty if you call and ask," she says. "That situation is never one I could accept."

Aging Is Factor in WNC Illness:

The quality of life of aging persons who are seriously ill and their caregivers is not a new one in western North Carolina.

"The Thomas' situation is not unlike that of many other families residing in western North Carolina," he says. "In some cases, the mountainous terrain is an impediment to care. With the holidays behind us, family members may have become more aware that the need for change is imminent."

How do families know when it's time to ask for help? Comeaux shares the five common ways families identify their need for assistance.

1. Watch for patterns of decline. "Are things getting worse over time, and how much worse?"
2. Family caregiver limits. "Is the family caregiver able to manage the aspects of care the person who is seriously ill currently needs?"
3. Self-monitoring abilities. "Can the individual manage his or her own medications, pay their bills, and remember to turn off appliances after they prepare meals or perform household tasks?"
4. Everyday quality of life. "An active social life and ability to engage in everyday activities is essential to a person's well-being. If this wanes, then it may be time to step in."
5. Ask for a health needs assessment. "Have you talked with the individual's physician to determine whether it's time to ask for additional help? The severity of limitations will help identify what level of assistance is needed."

For more information about care during serious illness or at end of life in western North Carolina, contact Four Seasons Compassion for Life, Flat Rock, at <http://www.fourseasonscfl.org/>.

* Photo Caption: Marie and Russell Thompson enjoy the holidays with their family, Christmas 2012.

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