

Local Agency Addresses Needs of Aging Population

When Middlebury, IN resident Larson Manifold's step-father, Tom Tinkel, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2008, the family didn't know what to expect.

"We knew he was becoming generally more forgetful and having some difficulty with things around the house," Manifold said. "But we had no idea how challenging things would become over the next few years."

At the time of his diagnosis, Tinkel lived alone at his residence in Warsaw, IN, but neighbors and relatives who kept a close eye on him became increasingly concerned in the months that followed.

"At first, it was just minor things like forgetting where he put his glasses. But it wasn't long before he started having problems maintaining his house, cooking and managing his bills," Manifold said. "We knew something more had to be done."

With help from his family, Tinkel moved to an apartment in Bluffton, IN, where he could be closer to friends and family. While this was a step in the right direction, according to Manifold, his disease continued to progress and it was not long before he needed more help than his family caregivers could provide.

"It was a very difficult time for everyone," Manifold said. "We were all trying so hard to allow him to live independently, because this was important to him, but he wasn't managing his medications well and he was losing weight because he wasn't eating the meals we were having delivered to him. It was a sad time."

Faced with medication, nutrition and safety issues, Manifold began looking into nursing home and assisted living facilities for his step-father. But just before making the decision to move Tinkel into a long-term care facility, Manifold found an agency that would send a caregiver into his apartment and provide assistance so he could remain at home.

"This was a God-send," said Manifold.

The caregiver cooks meals, shops, cleans, helps him run errands, provides medication reminders, helps him get around and, most importantly, says Manifold, provides companionship.

"He loves to talk about politics, news and reminisce about good times like golfing with his buddies, boating on Chapman Lake, and going to (Ft. Wayne) Komet hockey games."

Although managing the disease is still a struggle for Tinkel and his family, Manifold said, with the assistance of the caregiver, he has been able to remain at home.

Finding inspiration

Seeing what a positive impact home care had on his step-father, Manifold and his wife, Amy, who is a registered nurse, started a home care agency, Firefly Home Care, last year in Middlebury.

"Although the home care that we have received for my step-dad has been very helpful, we saw some significant opportunities for improvement – especially in the area of communication and coordination of care," Manifold said.

Manifold's idea for better care coordination began from another personal experience he had when his mom was diagnosed with cancer in 2003 and then died from the disease in 2004. Since then, his wife and he have cared for several other family members with serious illnesses and have noticed the need for better communication among families and healthcare providers.

"We're lucky to have so many great treatments and medications in the US, but sometimes the difference between poor and excellent care comes down to how well everyone is communicating," Manifold said. "Having the right information at the right time can empower patients, caregivers and healthcare providers to make better decisions. And in the end, just knowing the facts and having a plan can be a huge stress reducer."

According to the company's website www.fireflyhomecare.com, Firefly Home Care provides assistance with activities of daily living and provides resources and information its clients can use to make good decisions about home care. The company currently serves Elkhart and St. Joseph counties in Indiana.

Aging population creates needs, opportunities

The population of older Americans is growing rapidly and living longer than ever, according to "Older Americans 2012: Key Indicators of Well-Being," a report compiled by 15 government agencies.

According to the report, in 2010, people age 65 and over accounted for 13 percent of the total population in the United States. That number is expected to increase to 20 percent by 2030.

Last year, the oldest members of the "Baby Boom" generation turned 65 years old.

"As has been the case since the birth of this cohort," writes Katherine Wallman, Chief Statistician, in the report, "this very large generation will bring important challenges to the systems and institutions that support and enhance American life."

As people grow older, the odds of requiring assistance increase. According to the National Clearinghouse for Long-Term Care Information (www.longtermcare.gov), about 70 percent of people 65 and older will need some type of long-term care.

Many people receive care from a friend or family member – nearly 1 in 3 people in the US will provide care for someone they know in any given year, according to the Family Caregiver Alliance, National Center on Caregiving (www.caregiver.org). And it can take its toll: studies show that between 40 and 70 percent of family caregivers show clinical signs of depression.

When friends or family can no longer provide adequate care, there are professional options available, such as non-medical home care, home health care, assisted living facilities and nursing homes.

Payment sources for these services can vary, according to the National Clearinghouse for Long-term Care Information, but the most common source is private pay. Medicare pays for skilled services or rehabilitative care for a short period of time, and does not pay for assistance with activities of daily living, which makes up the majority of long-term care services. Medicaid can be used to cover the cost of long-term care, but recipients must qualify based on income and other state eligibility requirements. Most private health insurance plans cover the same type of care as Medicare, and there are private long-term care insurance plans that may cover additional long-term care costs. Other programs, such as the Older Americans Act and the Department of Veterans Affairs, pay for long-term care services, but only for specific populations and in certain circumstances.

The cost of long-term care can be substantial. According to the National Clearinghouse for Long Term Care Information, the average stay in a nursing home in Indiana costs \$217 per day for a single room, an assisted living facility costs \$2,799 per month, and the average non-medical home care provider charges \$19 per hour.

"Non-medical home care can be a cost-effective solution for many people when compared to other options," Manifold said, "but there are a lot of things to consider when choosing an agency, so just be sure to do your homework."