

Letter to the Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

By now, most of your readers are familiar with the tragic story of Terri Schiavo, the young Florida woman suddenly incapacitated in the prime of life, who is at the center of a bitter family and court battle about whether or not to keep her alive by artificial means.

The case has cast great attention on the need to have conversations with our loved ones, prompted by many Americans asking themselves, "If I was in her position, what would I want?" or even more importantly, "How would anyone else know what I want?"

In the Schiavo case, Terri's feeding tube was removed on October 15th by court order, on the request of her husband, Michael.

Then, in an unprecedented move, the Florida legislature passed a law, customized to her situation, which allowed Governor Jeb Bush to issue a one-time stay, which he immediately did. The tube was re-inserted, and the court battle rages on.

As reported in the Nov. 3, *Time Magazine*, "As judges attempt to untangle the thorny medical, ethical and now constitutional questions that swirl around her, the only certain outcome is that those closest to Terri will continue to tear each other apart."

Husband Michael recalls Terri saying she would never want to be kept alive on anything "artificial".

Her parents counter by recalling comments they heard Terri make about removing Karen Ann Quinlan's respirator. "How did they know they would want this?" and "How did they know she wouldn't want to go on?"

The missing piece is that they (Terri, her husband, and her parents) never had the conversation with each other about their wishes for care if a similar condition ever happened.

Nancy and Michael's 19th wedding anniversary was Saturday, Nov. 8. At this point in their marriage, much like other couples still in the prime of life, making life-and-death decisions was never a consideration.

All too often, we lull ourselves into complacency, thinking death or serious illness is something for old age...never now. It is estimated that 50% of us will not be able to make our health care decisions when the time comes at the end of life. Yet, only 24% of Americans have executed a Living Will or Health Care Power of Attorney, to place those wishes in writing.

Of those who do prepare some type of written document, 35% of these documents cannot be located when they are needed.

As the holidays approach, perhaps the best gift you can give to those you love (and to yourself) is to think and talk about your future health care wishes.

Is it an easy conversation? No! Sharing your thoughts- and letting your loved ones know what kind of care you would like if you became seriously ill- can give great peace of mind to those you love. It will also help to assure that you will receive the kind of care you want as you approach the end of life.

The goal of doing so is for you to live well, in a way that is meaningful to you, as long as you live.

Hospice of Iredell County has created a community program on this very topic- known as "Advanced Care Planning." We welcome the opportunity to come speak to your group, church, or organization about this important subject. Please call us at 704-873-4719 or 704-663-0051 to learn more.

We also have available a comprehensive 23-page planning guide, "Isn't It Time We Talk?", which takes you step-by-step through the

many decisions you want to consider before a time of crisis or serious illness. To cover our expenses, a \$2 donation per booklet is suggested, but not required. We encourage you to obtain one, or call to learn more.

You may also download a copy of either a NC Living Will or NC Healthcare Power of Attorney by visiting our website at www.hoic.org.

May I close with a challenge to your readers: Pledge to have this conversation with your loved ones before year's end. It may be the kindest gift you give this holiday season!

Ron D. Thompson
Executive Director
Hospice of Iredell County, Inc.

Collecting Angel Items

Once again this year Churchill Assisted Living of Mooresville will be collecting any Angel items for Lake Norman Regional Hospital for Christmas until Dec. 24. The agency will either pick up

or can drop off the Angels. On Christmas Day the Angels will be handed out to people in the Hospital. For more information call 704-658-1200.

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