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### BUSINESS OF MONTH

# Guiding light through crises

BY BRUCE STAPLEY

**W**ayne and Andrea Nathanson know a crisis when they see one.

The Thornhill couple established a personalized health care management business in the midst of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and then continued to offer their service throughout the SARS epidemic that turned hospital visits into a potential nightmare two years later.

Through it all, Qualicare Personalized Healthcare Solutions has established itself as a guiding light for people facing the uncertainties that come with a medical crisis. The home-based business offers its clients guidance and ongoing support, as well as hands-on services and products related to their specific condition.

"We were registering our website at the same time the terrorist attacks were taking place on Sept. 11, 2001," Mr. Nathanson said. "Here we were trying to help people through crises and such a monumental crisis was happening."

The experience served to firm the couple's resolve to help clients.

"The way people helped each other in New York set the standard for us. We wanted to achieve that standard."

Mrs. Nathanson, a registered nurse with 23 years experience in medical and social health care, said the incentive to start the business was provided by the growing frustrations she felt as a nurse working within the limitations of standard hospital care.

"It was hard to work in the hospital setting. We weren't able to look after people the way I was trained to," she said.

Mrs. Nathanson began offering her services as a case manager for people looking for assistance for themselves or their loved ones in trying to make sense of a jungle of health care options and decisions.

"So many people were phoning me to help them navigate their way through the system. I was really busy putting agencies into place, etc."

Mrs. Nathanson asked her husband for help in setting up a business where she could apply her knowledge of the health



Andrea and Wayne Nathanson, presidents of Qualicare, are proud of the company that provides health care management, hands-on services and walking equipment.

care system on a full-time basis.

"I'm very much into health care, but not into business," she said.

Mr. Nathanson applied his 20 years experience in sales and business development in Canada and the United States to the enterprise and it soon took flight.

The couple learned first-hand the importance of personalized solutions for people facing medical crises when Mr. Nathanson arranged to have his father moved from Halifax to Toronto after the senior Nathanson developed Lou Gehrig's Disease.

After buying his parents a condomini-

um here, Mr. Nathanson went to Halifax to sell their car and tend to other details that had to be settled before they could move.

"Once we moved them here, we learned how little the system does for people in my father's position. They're thrown into a difficult, challenging system. Every day there's a new barrier to cross and there's no one there to help them."

Wayne's father died in 1999.

"We dedicated our company to him," Mr. Nathanson said. "He set the bar for the standards of care we would develop in our business. He showed us what we had to do, what equipment was needed, how houses

had to be modified for proper care for people with disabilities."

"We set out to provide case-managed care by nurses 24/7," Mrs. Nathanson said. "Our case managers provide medical and emotional support and anything else that's needed."

The SARS outbreak proved one of the toughest challenges for Qualicare.

"Our caregivers were only allowed to go to one hospital," Mrs. Nathanson said. "People in hospitals completely lost their sensitivity. But we came through it."

The SARS outbreak led Qualicare to advocate home care for clients whenever possible.

"That's when we started our campaign to keep people out of hospitals," she said.

She outlined her company's stand on keeping patients at home when she was a guest of Andy Barrie on CBC Radio's Ontario Morning show in early April.

The Qualicare team has grown to include five full-time administrative case managers and 45 caregivers who work under contract.

With an average of 25 clients under the company's care at any given time, the case managers work with family and the client's medical team to supervise care.

The Nathansons pride themselves in taking the time to assess each specific situation.

"It's personalized health care. No two people are the same," Mrs. Nathanson said, adding they also serve as an advocate for clients. "We start by getting them everything they are entitled to from the government."

The business has been well received.

"We doubled our revenue in 2004 compared to 2003," Mr. Nathanson said, adding 2003 also saw a huge increase in revenue from 2002.

But the Nathansons insist the real payoff goes far beyond the numbers.

"We earn our clients' trust," Mrs. Nathanson said. "We take care of them and they know it. That's why we're successful."

"It's an incredibly rewarding business and we work hard at it," Mr. Nathanson said.

For more information, call 905-882-0686.