

# Passion a common thread in HME business



For Wayne and Danyelle Carroll, owning Mobility Medical, Inc. in the heart of Mississippi, was the next step in the natural progression of their partnership, and their shared passion for helping people. When the two health-care professionals met, Danyelle worked at a local hospital, and Wayne was a sales representative for a durable medical equipment company.

"Wayne was a rep for a DME company that specialized in two products," Danyelle recalls. "I was working at the hospital he delivered them to and he just didn't have much of a product line. I saw a real need for more than what he was offering. I also saw tremendous potential in Wayne; I knew he was capable of so much more."

After the two married, Danyelle continued her work as a nurse and Wayne began working for another DME company.

"I love nursing," she says with the eloquence that so often accompanies the inflection of the Deep South. "I have been an RN since 1992. I wasn't sure I wanted to give it up, but I saw a need for more service to this area and I realized that Wayne

was so capable of owning his own company. So five years ago we started Mobility Medical, Inc. and now in addition to our store in Flowood, we opened one in Tupelo as well."

"We knew the only way we could make this a successful business was if we did it together," Danyelle shares. "Raising our two children and being a small business owner is such a full-time job, some things just get put on hold. We worked very hard to get everything in order, to get everything started. Wayne is such an integral part of this business. I think I am more behind the scenes. We literally started this thing on faith."

The Flowood store is situated right outside centrally located Jackson. The Carroll's new venture in Tupelo is located in the northeast part of the state, and services cities as far north as Memphis, Tenn. Danyelle's passion for the people she services sometimes turns to frustration brought on by an industry plagued by government restrictions and roadblocks.



"When you go to a retail store, you pay at the time of service," she says.

"With a DME you put the equipment or service out there and then you literally pray to God you get paid. We started this business just when regulations were really starting to be enforced. But this is Wayne's business, this is all he knows, and we do a great job. We have 20 employees, two locations and we are working our way through the accreditation process."

According to the determined co-owner, the HME industry is battling the black eye it received from "over-reimbursement" that happened 15 to 20 years ago.

"That was the era of the 'golden commode'," she says. "You just don't see reimbursement for products like that anymore and the cuts have been so tremendous, it is really hard to see a profit, especially in the high-end rehab market due to the risks associated with it."

"People in this business are afraid for their livelihoods," she continues.

"And it's because of the rules and regulations that have come down the pipeline. We are doing everything we can. We do everything we can to comply, yet still, with frequent HCPCS code and policy changes, sometimes it feels next to impossible."

The dynamic DME duo bought their building in Flowood and they have 10,000 square feet in which to display their large product line.

"Our front showroom is handicapped accessible," Danyelle explains. "But we do most of our high end rehab in a home or at the hospital. There are so many regulations. We go through paper by the pallet. It's unreal."

High-end rehabilitation requires intense involvement with patients. Danyelle's nursing background has been vital to this division of the busi-

ness. As an RN, her specialty was rehab. Because of her background, Danyelle says she is aware of the importance of accreditation.

"It is key to have qualified, certified people in place," she says. "Our ATS and NRRTS guys are vital

to our business. We try to get certified in everything we can that has anything to do with rehab. We have, in our stores, very involved chairs and very basic chairs. We service the highest-level, quadriplegic, vent-dependent, sip-n-puff patients. Some of these patients are multi-involved and the frustration comes from not being able to help them in a timely manner. What we want these legislators to realize is that the cost of one power chair is peanuts — mere peanuts — when compared to a hospital stay."

Unfortunately, patients who need high-end rehabilitation are at the highest risk for complications and often need immediate attention. CMS regulations governing power mobility equipment providers, and Medicare reimbursements sometimes present insurmountable barriers for dependent patients.

"We had two patients not long ago, who, because of

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the required face-to-face evaluation visit with their doctor, suffered severely," Danyelle shares with obvious sadness. "The patients do not see their doctors very often. For them to leave their home and travel is daunting and even dangerous. When they are not well it is even more so, not to mention the financial burden of getting to a doctor. To transport a patient via ambulance is very costly and unnecessary when a qualified PT can see them in their home and be liaison to their physician. CMS regulations take this component away with their new face-to-face policy."

"Many of the patients we deal with have chronic conditions. We have five customer patients like this right now. We have had them die before they get their equipment, because of the 30-day advance determination rule, and many end up in the hospital for an extended stay with avoidable surgeries that cost upwards of \$60,000. And that is for the surgery alone, which of course happened because we went by the book on the policy as restricted by Medicare." Danyelle and Wayne are active participants in the Mississippi Association of Medical Equipment Suppliers and feel it is imperative for HME dealers to be involved activists for the industry.

"If we do not unite, Congress will never hear our plea," she says passionately. "We see the

catastrophic effects with our chronic patients. They are launched into nowhere land. We see the human side to this, and we will be all be losing lots of dollars because of complications. It does not have to be that \$60,000 or \$100,000 price tag. It can be the \$12,000 price tag. CMS focus needs to be on letting DMEs do our job because we can prevent these costly complications. We keep people out of the hospital!"

"DME only makes up two percent of the Medicare budget," she adds emphatically. "We are honest, hard-working folks and we have to make the time to be active on these issues." As their Flowood business flourished, Wayne and Danyelle were approached by physical therapists and clinicians about the possibility of opening a storefront in the northern part of the state.

"We wanted to provide a better service for our

patients who are discharged from hospitals and we saw a real need in the northern part of Mississippi," she explains. "We are busy streamlining where we

will continue to grow in the midst of all this chaos," she says. "It is frustrating that we don't get much information ahead of time from CMS and it makes it difficult

for all of us to prepare for what's coming down the pipe. I see myself fighting the good fight." Geographically, Mobility Medical was affected by each of the hurricanes to storm across the region since last year.

"Again, it is a bit frustrating that our independent HMEs were not given the recognition or credit for being the compassionate industry we are. We did not get paid a dime for the portable oxygen we took around during the disasters that hit

here, but we are the first to get reimbursement cuts for overspending in other areas?"

Danyelle was named one of the top 50 businesswomen in Mississippi. Judged by a panel of previous award winners, the award carries with it respect and prestige in the business world.

"It was a real honor," Danyelle shares. "I am humbled by it

really...being a no-frills kind of girl and talking to patients about their decubitus ulcers," she adds, with a smile.

Wayne and Danyelle give credit to each other and their staff for working together toward the success of their business.

"Our employees are an extension of us," she says proudly. "We hold them to a high standard. We work together like a well-maintained machine. That is why we do as well as we do. We'd be nowhere without our staff. Period."

"Wayne is the yin to my yang," she concludes.

When the couple met with Congressman Chip Pickering in late August, Wayne told his wife to let him do all the talking. "He knows how passionate I get when it comes to the hoops we have to jump through to get our patients the help they need. This has been a 50/50 venture from the start. We are partners in every sense of the word."

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***-Danyelle Carroll-***

can. We use an imaging program and are looking into a GPS system for our van fleet. We have three at our new location in Tupelo and six in Jackson."

Despite the challenges and hurdles she and Wayne face every day, Danyelle has a positive vision for the future of her family's business and the industry as a whole.

"I do envision that we