

THE CARE FACTOR

Anna Shepherd has translated her healthcare business success into philanthropic endeavours. In Private reports.

Anna Shepherd, CEO of Regal Health Services, admits she's been grappling with huge growth. On the business front, there's the management of the community nursing business she took over from her pioneering mother, Patricia, who recognised a need for home-based nursing in the healthcare sector 46 years ago. While raising her children, Patricia founded and managed one of Australia's largest providers of community nursing services.

When her mother retired six years ago and Shepherd took control of the family business, she knew the demand for Regal Health Services was greater than ever, and growing. "There are huge drivers to having healthcare delivered at home. Hospital emergency departments are backed up, often ambulances can't get in... private health funds are supporting hospital substitution ensuring people can receive care at home...

There's a shift to population management through GP practices," she points out.

With an ageing population, demand for the business's specialised clinical focus on care and ongoing case management services runs even stronger today. "The average age of our clientele is 86, with a younger clientele emerging as the baby boomers age. We've experienced 56 percent growth in the business in the past five years," notes Shepherd, who effectively manages a 30-ward hospital, with a team of almost 100, from the 19th floor of a Sydney city office block. "We have an emergency department here that's triaging people (referred by doctors and hospitals) into different 'wards' according to where they live across the greater metropolitan area. We service 30 regions with nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists who are engaged to visit patients in their own homes."

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Shepherd says she inherited a 'hands-on' approach to business from her mother. For 10 years, the pair operated as 'a tag team' with the phones, running the business from home, before moving to the city in 1993. From her earliest days in the business – she originally agreed to do the secretarial work for a month in 1983 – now nearly 30 years later, Shepherd found her passion in this industry and has been acknowledged for her ability to push boundaries. In 1990, at just 28, she was the facilitator for the World Congress on Ageing in Sydney with the Australian Association of Gerontology. Subsequently in 1994, she successfully campaigned for accredited standards for community nursing with the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards, the body accrediting all hospitals. Regal was the first private community nursing service in Australia to be accredited. She also collaborates with Sydney University on curriculum and mentoring. In 2011, she was a NSW finalist in the Telstra Business Women's Awards. "Ultimately, I want to see nursing more valued by the community as a profession," she says.

A few years ago, she realised she needed to take time for her own professional growth and admits to being thrilled when accepted as the only Australian woman for Harvard Business School's Owner/President program in 2008. Participating in the three-year program, that offers a residential all-in for its illustrious students for one month annually, has changed the way she views the business – and the world. People from companies across the globe are brought together to explore diverse business topics from macroeconomics to family business issues, marketing, leadership, finance, strategy and innovation.

"It's like a mini-United Nations," enthuses Shepherd, who was elected co-chair of Harvard's newly formed Global Social Responsibility Program in 2009. The experience nurtured a deeper interest in philanthropy that dovetails with her strongly held beliefs on the importance of community, overcoming social isolation and connectivity amongst the community – finding ways to make giving back more effective.

Shepherd says she was privileged to share her views and, more so, to hear the philanthropic approach of Abigail Disney – a friend of ANZ Private and ANZ Trustees. "We discussed her legacy of inheritance through Walt Disney and how she wanted to set up groups for women with

From left to right, May Azam, Anna Shepherd and Katie Gaunt.

HIV or those affected by war – supporting, educating and empowering them, rather than just giving handouts without seeing any consequence," she recalls.

For her part, Shepherd says her approach to philanthropy is 'organic'. Opportunities to give back have emerged through the business. Patricia and Anna set up Regal Knitters, a group of patients who knit squares that go to Wrap with Love, a not-for-profit started by one of the patients, and to date have dispatched 15,000 squares to ward off hypothermia. Regal Angels Wise Women's Luncheon Group brings together professional women of all ages to share their knowledge and ideas and show their ongoing relevance beyond retirement. More recently a number of male wise men have asked to join and have been happily accepted.

The pair also toured Africa in 2008 considering philanthropic opportunities. Shepherd smiles as she tells how the customer service and business suggestions she gave to a taxi driver on that trip were so successful that six months later he wrote to say he'd been able to buy two more taxis! "That shows know-how and time is needed rather than handouts," she attests.

Through ANZ Private Wealth, Shepherd has also been introduced to the bank's trustee service and some of its interests. "I like the way ANZ supports us and connects us with other philanthropic activities," she says. The ANZ Private Wealth relationship originally started with Patricia's retirement, but now encompasses Regal's business banking, and a family trust with investment portfolios covering conservative and high-growth strategies.

"It made sense to have private client and family business interests looked after in the one place, so they don't have to tell stories multiple times," says Katie Gaunt, their long-time wealth manager who more recently passed the role to May Azam.

Testament to Shepherd's inspiring abilities and the benefit of the insights she gained at Harvard, she's largely self-reliant when it comes to business banking, notes Azam, who's looking forward to providing further philanthropic possibilities.

"That's the path I'm definitely heading down and where I hope to spend much more time in the future," says Shepherd. Sounds like another growth story. **IP**