

A great bedside manner

Former nurse comes full circle, with a twist

By Lorraine Agnew
Courier-Post Staff

Michael Newell of Haddonfield speaks from more than 30 years of experience.

When people are diagnosed as disabled, or are ill or under critical care, says Newell, a registered nurse and president of LifeSpan Care Management in Camden, they want their life to be "normal."

That is what he hopes to give his clients, and he says with pride, "That's a noble quest."

When it comes to personal health-care issues, adds Newell, 59, "If you control your involvement and if you are involved, you are going to do better. And we give a family that control. It's not just about making money. It's about you being better."

His successful career has taken him from the bedside as a nurse, to the insurance arena as a case-management supervisor, to hospital management, and now back to the bedside.

But don't expect him to show up with a blood pressure cuff or thermometer. In 2004, Newell created LifeSpan Care Management, LLC, and today, Newell's bedside manner focuses on health-care management instead of actual health care.

History of caring

Born in Philadelphia and raised in Merchantville, Newell graduated from Camden Catholic High School in 1966. Thinking he wanted to be a priest, he attended St. Charles College in Baltimore, but realized the priesthood wasn't for him.

In the 1970s, he took a job caring for patients at Philadelphia State Hospital in Philadelphia. Although the experience of working with the mentally ill made him consider being a psychologist, he chose to go into nursing instead.

However, he says, "That made me realize that if I was going to be a psychologist, I would have to get



Michael Newell proudly displays a sign for his company, LifeSpan Care Management, at his office in the Camden Waterfront Technology Center in Camden. It has been Newell's lifelong dream to own a company dedicated to helping people manage their health care options.

a doctorate."

He returned to school, attending La Salle University in Philadelphia.

"I was a psychology major," he says.

However, being the oldest of 11 children, Newell realized that the financial burden of such an undertaking would rest solely on his shoulders.

"I saw that if I got a nursing degree, I could go to Philadelphia Community

College and that was only two years. I could be making a living at it. I planned to be a psychiatric nurse when I originally went into nursing school."

Also, he adds, "The nurses had more natural contact with the patients. The patients would be different with a psychologist than they would with the nurses and they were able to assist that patient from the personal point of view."

He liked the way patients connected with him.

During that time, Newell was

something of an activist, says his long time friend and current chief operating officer at LifeSpan, Diane Gager.

She says that while he worked for Philadelphia State Hospital, he found the living conditions of the patients deplorable.

"He's a rebel," she says with admiration. "He stood on the steps of the hospital and handed out fliers protesting the conditions within."

Newell earned a bachelor's degree in humanities from La Salle in 1977, then returned and earned a bachelor's degree in nursing in 1989 and a master's degree in nursing in 1992.

He worked at several hospitals in the Philadelphia and South Jersey area, including Einstein Medical Center, Temple University, Jefferson Hospital and Cooper Hospital.

The other side

His career then took a turn. He moved into case management for the Fortis Corp., now CorVel in

ON THE WEB

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Cherry Hill.

Now working from the insurance company's point of view, Newell says his belief was that, "The most appropriate care is the most cost-effective."

As an example, he says, "When you are on disability insurance, it gets easy to sit at home."

He wanted to give people what they really wanted and, he says, "Most people want to get well and get back to work."

Being on disability insurance, he says, goes on a person's record. "It affects their career. It affects the quality of their lives."

After CorVel, he worked for Ernst & Young, LLP, also as a case-management supervisor.

While there he published two books.

The first, "Using Nursing Care Management to Improve Health Outcomes," was published in 1996.

"This one was used for graduate programs for nurse care management," Newell said.

He co-authored another book titled, "Reinventing Your Nursing Career: A Handbook for Success in the Age of Managed Care" in 1998 with a colleague, Mario Pinardo.

"Over the next years," says Newell, "I did consulting and worked with agencies in the hospitals. I kept my hand in that. I was working part time as an adjunct clinical instructor for different nursing programs at Gloucester County College, Jefferson Hospital and Temple."

In 2003, he recalls, "I was a clinical professor at Drexel University. On the weekend, I was in the ICU at Our Lady of Lourdes in Camden."

He maintained that schedule until July 2005 when he went full-time, working only at LifeSpan.

Although he actually started his business three years ago, he says, "I was doing it part-time

Newell: Nurse finds a way back

Growing a business

Newell, who is married to Nadia, 50, was managing his business from his home. Although he was close to his three children -- Michael, 18, Domenica, 16, and Catherine, 13 -- he says he needed to move.

"If you are really going to grow a business, you need to move out of your house. You need to separate your personal life from your business life."

He currently rents office space at The Waterfront Technology Center at Camden on Federal Street.

The center is sponsored through the Rutgers Business Incubator, which is part of the New Jersey Economic Development Council.

Newell says today he does the same thing he did when he managed cases for the insurance company; however, "Now, the client is the family. It's really to get the patient through the system and help the family understand what's going on so everybody makes the right decision. They have someone to go to if they are having a problem."

Armed with a fully loaded PDA, he says he has the needed information at his fingertips. Whether he accompanies a client to a hospital, a doctor's office or a nursing home, he has the knowledge and experience and is prepared to assist his clients with anything that comes up.

"We don't know everything," he admits, "but we do know what questions to ask. We know what answers aren't making sense. Also, we know where to find the answers."

Says Gager, "He is very modest. He is incredibly smart and very kind. I can't say enough good things about Mike Newell."

They share a deep friendship between her family and his, she says, "He has advised me and my loved ones more than once."

The GuardianKey

One LifeSpan feature is the Guardian Key, Gager says.

"We put the present medical record on a USB flash drive. All of the information is there. If you went into the hospital, you would have everything you need to get the care started."

While anyone could gather their own information and place it on a flash drive, and Newell recommends that everyone should do this, his company has created a format that makes the information easy to access and read on any personal computer.

By doing that, he says, "If you have a problem and run into a wall, we can be there for you because we already know you."

Michael Newell uses these brochures to publicize his company, LifeSpan Care Management, which has offices in Camden and which helps people manage their health care options.

Aside from Gager, he also contracts with six registered nurses.

"Some of them I have known because they did case management over the years," he says.

Newell also holds seminars to teach people how to manage their own healthcare needs.

"Right now, we are planning a fall seminar for the Parish Nurses Association for the Diocese of Camden," he says.

And, as spiritual guides, they are often asked for a deeper understanding of the illness. Questions like, "Why did this happen to me," or "m I being punished," are often asked.

"This is very important. These," stresses Newell, "are the wrong questions."

And, after a lifetime of helping others in time of need, he says people need to ask, "What am I going to do about it?"

"That," he adds, "is the right question." ■



Chris LaChall/Courier-Post
Michael Newell, President of LifeSpan Care Management, and Diane Gager, Chief Operating Officer of LifeSpan Care Management, look over their website from their office near the Camden waterfront.

MICHAEL NEWELL

- **Born:** Philadelphia, 1948
- **Family:** Wife, Nadia; three children, Michael, 18, Domenica, 16 and Catherine, 13
- **Residence:** Haddonfield
- **Education:** Camden Catholic High School, 1966; St. Charles College, 1968; Philadelphia Community College, associate's degree in nursing 1974; LaSalle University, bachelor's degree in humanities 1977, bachelor's degree in nursing, 1989, and master of science in nursing administration 1992. Nursing experience: Staff RN Med-Surgical at Medical College of Pennsylvania; Staff RN Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital, Adolescent Treatment Center (psychology); Staff RN, Albert Einstein Medical Center, Northern Division, Medical CCU and Infectious Disease; Staff RN, Medical and Surgical CCU, Thomas Jefferson University Hospital; Assistant Head Nurse, Albert Einstein Medical Center-Daroff Division; Critical Care Supervisor, Pennsylvania Hospital; Staff nurse for temporary agencies, including Medstaff, Superior Care and Kimberly; Contract RN with Skilled Nursing Inc. and Criticare.; Staff RN, Temple University Hospital in Neurosurgical Intensive Care Unit and Emergency Room; Self-employed as contract staff nurse working in critical care units through Nurseworks (now Intellistaff), Bala Cynwyd, Pa., and Criticare, Holmes, Pa. Hospitals placed in included, West Jersey (all four sites), Cooper-UMDNJ, Crozer-Chester, Presbyterian, Germantown, Chestnut Hill, Roxborough, Taylor, Episcopal, Thomas Jefferson, and Wills Eye Neurosensory Center.
- **Care management experience:** Supervisor of Case Management for the Fortis Corp. (now CorVel), Cherry Hill; Manager, Health Care Consulting Group, Ernst & Young LLP, Iselin, NJ.; Principal and case manager, Managed Care Consultants; President LifeSpan Care Management, LLC, Camden. Teaching experience: Adjunct Nursing Clinical Instructor; Thomas Jefferson University; Philadelphia Community College; Temple University; Gloucester County College; Allegheny University School of Nursing; Mercer County Community College; Drexel University Nursing Program.
- **Certifications:** Certified as proficient in critical care by the American Association of Critical Care Nurses (now expired); Certified as Case Manager by the Certification of Insurance Rehabilitation Specialist Commission.