

Home care business is growing

Beverley Hudec

IN four years Gilian Douglass has taken her home care business from her own home to a Belrose business park.

With more than 25 years' nursing experience ranging from intensive care to hospital administration at Royal North Shore Hospital, Mrs Douglass realised how important it is to provide quality community care to an increasing market.

"By 2016 we will see people aged 65 to 84 increase by 25 per cent," Mrs Douglass said. "People over 85 will have increased by 50 per cent. The prevalence of dementia is projected to increase over four-fold by 2050."

Preferring to expand Oxley Home Care slowly because she said she would like to maintain quality, Mrs Douglass and her husband Fraser, who concentrates

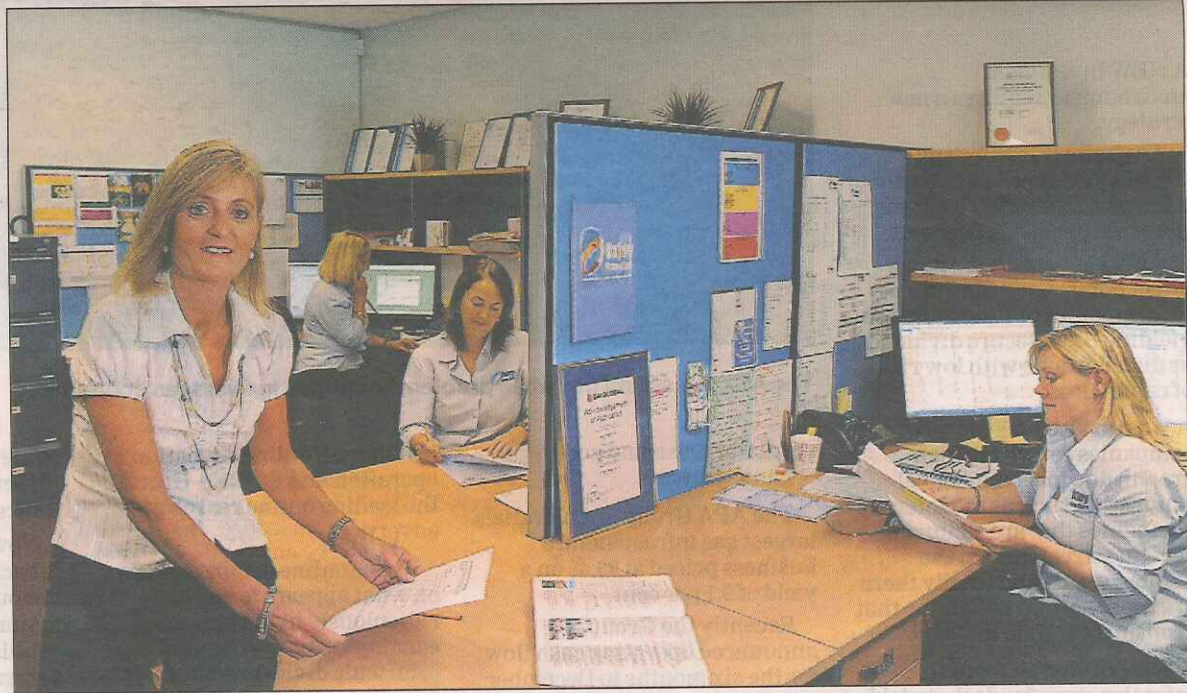
on policy development and finance, now employ seven administrative staff and a team of 80 home care assistants.

Since its set-up in March 2006, their home care business visits clients in all three local government areas. "I've built the business from scratch - and with my nursing background I could see that people didn't want to go into homes," she said.

"I spent the first two years operating from my study - in the beginning I would do all the paperwork myself as well as providing all the care.

"Focusing on quality ensures we maintain our standards and I can keep my finger on the pulse."

Plans to expand further to the northern Sydney catchment area including the lower North Shore, Ryde and Hornsby are immediate goals for the business, Mrs Douglass said.



Oxley Home Care's manager Gilian Douglass with Michele Ferris, Kathy Robinson and Kerry Bradley.

Picture: VIRGINIA YOUNG - PP377405

Care workers step in to cover home-based services ranging from short-term respite and domestic duties, to meal preparation, personal health care and companionship. They also provide clients with a link with the outside world, transporting them to medical appointments, shopping trips and social engagements.

The healthcare industry is predicted to boom over the next five years. According to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, the number of skilled jobs within the industry will increase to 211,500,

almost double its closest rival, the construction industry, with 120,800 jobs. Employing the right calibre of staff is paramount, Mrs Douglass said. "Our focus is quality and education - our workers are the most important part of our business. The people we recruit are caring and compassionate."

With a predominantly female workforce, Oxley Home Care offers flexible working hours.

On-the-job training is an essential requirement and novice home care assistants are buddied up with experienced workers, Mrs Douglass said.

Carers are encouraged to obtain relevant qualifications. One new initiative rolled out this month with NSW TAFE broadened training for 10 employees through the introduction of certificate III in Home and Community Care.

Last month Community Care Northern Beaches CEO Pam Batkin and Mackellar Federal Liberal MP Bronwyn Bishop endorsed Oxley Home Care's educational program by attending an afternoon tea for three care workers, who received their certificate IV in Community Services.