



OPTIONS Preparing to Celebrate its 20th Anniversary

BY DANIEL CASCIATO

One of the leading home health care groups in the Atlanta region, Options For Senior America Corp. (OPTIONS), celebrates its 20th anniversary next year. Much has changed since in the home health care industry since its inception.

When OPTIONS was established in April 1989, home health care, especially 24-hour care, was not as prevalent and available as it is now.

"Most seniors would have rather stayed at home than be put in a facility, no matter how luxurious the facility was," says Ramzi Rihani, President and CEO of OPTIONS. "Our vision was to provide an alternative to institutionalized living. That alternative had to be a more personalized and kinder alternative."

The idea was developed around this theme and quickly caught attention when OPTIONS demonstrated how its first few clients were much happier receiving home health care in the comfort of their own homes than at an assisted living facility or a nursing home.

"We got on the bandwagon at the early stages of the industry and that helped us in



Ramzi Rihani

becoming a major regional player in the field," says Rihani.

Today, OPTIONS has 12 branches and one franchise serving over 53 counties in seven states. The organization started providing services in the Atlanta region 12 years ago. Currently OPTIONS serves about 150 to 200 seniors per year in the metro area. Overall, it has provided services for over 15,000 people.

To commemorate its 20th anniversary next year, OPTIONS is planning a big campaign with a main theme "Give Back to the Community."

"We will offer free hours of service to different institutions and families as a thank you for the trust they have put in us for the past 20 years," says Rihani.

There have been many other significant changes for the better in the home care services industry since OPTIONS was founded.

"One important change is that the advent of the Internet has made it easier for people looking for services for their loved ones to access a larger number of providers in a relatively short period of time," comments Rihani. "Search engines specifically tailored to the senior market as well as national

referral network on the Web have facilitated the search for a provider in all 50 states."

Another change has to do with the number of home health care providers which has mushroomed in the last 15 years.

"This, however, has left the burden on the consumer to decipher which providers offer the best and most reliable services," says Rihani. "We at Options have developed a seminar called How to Choose Your Home Health Care Provider to assist consumers in their selection process and ensure they ask all the necessary questions to get a better understanding of the capabilities and the limitations of a home health care provider to enable them select the right agency that will most fit their individual needs."

Another change of note in the industry is that state regulations are being enforced to improve the quality of the services offered.

"Also, Long Term Care insurance companies, which figured a source of payment for only 3 percent of our client base in the first couple of years of operation, now have become about 20 percent of our total clients," Rihani adds. "We expect this to grow to 50 percent of clients by the year 2020. All in all, many changes have been introduced since the late eighties—which hopefully have improved the quality of care."

As he looks ahead to the future, Rihani says that we are on the verge of experiencing a big expansion in the senior market

and any serious provider will have to be well positioned to be able to cope with this growth.

"Today one in 8 Americans is over the age of 62," he says. "As the baby boomers reach the age of 62, the impact of those who were born between 1946 and 1964 will create 80 million additional Americans who are 62 years of age and older. According to the last US 2000 Census, there were 35 million over the age of 65. This number is expected to reach 71 million in the year 2030."

As a result, this makes the senior citizens population the fastest growing segment of the population in all 50 states by 2030. All of these drastic changes in the demographics of our population will require that major players in the home health care industry be well equipped to handle this growth both from a quantitative as well as a qualitative standpoint.

"Our group is preparing to embark on a parallel growth path to accompany the population growth while continuously improving the level of care provided," Rihani says. "Since our inception we have been growing at the rate of a new office every 18 months. Now we are preparing for an accelerated growth plan to match the requirement of the expected population growth in the coming 25 years."

For more information on OPTIONS, visit www.optionscorp.com.