

Total coverage

Hospital robe maker aims to fill gap in health-care apparel market

BY JAMES BRIGGS

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While hospitalized with a blood clot in 2004, Paula Milgrom wanted to walk down to the Starbucks in the Royal Oak Beaumont Hospital.

Her desire dwindled, however, as Milgrom tried to hold together her hospital gown while walking down the hall.

"Here I was in a hospital gown, with an opening in the back, and I didn't know what to hold or where to hold onto," said Milgrom of West Bloomfield. "I was feeling very vulnerable, very uncomfortable. I said to myself there's got to be a better way."

After watching her sister experience the same problem about a year later, Milgrom decided enough was enough. She began working to create a product that would allow hospital patients to move freely through the halls without worrying about exposing certain body parts.

The result: RxPJs™ comfort in a zip™, a stylish blue robe that zips over hospital gowns and provides flexibility for people attached to medical equipment. The robes, placed on the market in April, are unisex and one-size-fits-most.

The design process was a long one for Milgrom, who co-owned

Mercury Paint Co. until they sold it a few years ago. She experimented with several styles of housecoats and took them to a seamstress. When the project became more complex than expected, Milgrom studied up on fashion trends and connected with a manufacturer in New York.

"I started reading fashion books," she said. "I didn't think I was getting into the fashion business, but I needed to understand fabrics and dyes."

When Milgrom's work resulted in a serviceable product, she took the robes to Providence Hospital in Southfield and created a focus group of 25 nurses who reviewed the product and made suggestions. With the flaws worked out, Milgrom has begun selling the robes for \$70 (adults), \$60 (children) and \$50 (bed jackets) each.

Milgrom's product is in two retail outlets, and she's looking for ways to introduce the robes to hospital gift shops.

"I think there was no question about the need to give a patient dignity at a very vulnerable time in their life," she said.

Between purchasing and designing material, working with patent attorneys, making trips to New York and starting the marketing process, Milgrom has



Paula Milgrom: Finding a better way.

Photo by: MARK BIALEK

spent plenty of money - she declined to say exactly how much - launching the RxPJs™ comfort in a zip™. But she expects to turn a profit within two to three years, she said.

"It's not a hobby," she said.

The RxPJs™ became the next business venture for Milgrom, who has been a business owner and tax advisor in the past.

"I always thought there was something else I was going to do after we sold (Mercury Paint), but I never knew exactly what it was going to be," she said. "But I knew I wasn't ready to retire."