

A MODEST PROPOSAL

Hospital robe eliminates that embarrassing gap problem



RxPJs, a hospital gown developed by West Bloomfield Township resident Paula Milgrom, lets patients stroll without gaps in the back or front.



Handy zippers allow doctors and nurses access to their patients.

By **MARK H. STOWERS**

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When Paula Milgrom found herself in a local hospital—in her hospital-issued gown, trying to walk with an IV bottle—she made a discovery that thousands of patients have grumbled about.

The clumsily fitting gown wouldn't stay tied and had gaps in both the front and the back that made her an unwitting "indecent exposure" participant.

She saw the same thing happen to her sister during a hospital stay, so she decided to do something about it. She went home and created RxPJs.

"In 2004, I was in the hospital flat on my back for two days," Milgrom said. "Then I could start walking around, but I had an IV that I absolutely could not get disconnected from."

Her husband, Jim Barnett, was excited to walk her through the new additions to the hospital.

"So there I am in my hospital gown with an opening in the back and another in the front. I'm a small person, so the gown is hanging open and the ties don't work," she said. "And I was walking into this beautiful lounge area and this nice Starbucks, and I'm so uncomfortable. I'm exposed all over and I don't know what to hold onto. My husband didn't know what to do. So I said walk behind me, then next to me. It was awful."

A few months later, she was back at the hospital, but as a visitor for her sister.

"I would take my sister for a walk and I was just amazed at all the people walking around and how degrading it is to be in a hospital gown," she said, "I felt that vulnerable feeling and said, 'I'm going to do something.'"

Her solution began with buying several housecoats and robes and taking them to a seamstress with her idea of perfecting the hospital gown.

"I had her put zippers in the shoulders," she said. "She did about 20 of them in different styles with different materials."

With her sister in the hospital again, Milgrom put her creation into action.

"I took the robes and questionnaires thinking I could just give them to patients, but you can't do that because of the privacy issues," she said. "But my sister wore one and so did her roommate. Then I got a nurse to look at it and her manager; and I asked them if I could do a focus group with the nurses."

The following week, Milgrom brought her wearables and questionnaires for the 25 nurses and doctors who showed up to participate in the focus group.

"They gave me a lot of feedback, mostly positive, a little negative, but the whole thing was great," she said.

Milgrom took her new-found knowledge, made

some tweaks and found a pattern maker and came up with the RxPJ.

"Then it was a matter of getting the right fabric and the right manufacturer," she said.

Diving into the fashion world, Milgrom visited New York City to learn the basics of fabrics and dye terminology and much, much more. During her fashion education, she decided to design a children's robe with multicolored zippers, as well as a bed jacket for patients who aren't mobile but still need a modest robe.

"My focus now is in sales and marketing to get my product out there," she said. "I've got some significant leads."

Milgrom has already put together one showing and is participating in a fund-raiser for the social work department at the University of Michigan Hospital on July 25 in the Triangle in Ann Arbor.

"I have a patent pending on them and they are 'one size fits most,' but as the manufacturer I can do just about anything," Milgrom said.

The children's robes come in two sizes, have many colored zippers and retail for \$60. The adult robe retails for \$72, and the bed jackets are \$50. For now the robes come in only blue, but as their popularity takes off, Milgrom plans to offer more colors. The lightweight, thermal robes are 50 percent cotton and 50 percent polyester for ease of washing and durability.

"I'm very proud that they are 'Made in the USA,'" she said. "I can't even tell you how many times I've washed mine, and I can't even tell you how many calls I've gotten from folks who are still wearing them at home."

Milgrom's plan is to get her robes into hospital and medical facilities, as well as to regular retail customers.

"I take mine to the doctor's office because I don't want to wear those paper gowns. I've got a robe that unzips in all the strategic places," she said.

"There's no problem with access to anything."

Milgrom has her RxPJs in a few stores, in addition to her "on the street sales," she said. She is updating and upgrading her Web site, www.rxpjs.com with complete ordering details. So far she has invested \$50,000 into the creation of RxPJs, but the West Bloomfield Township resident's quest is driven by helping folks—not the bottom line.

"I haven't made a profit, but I've made sales," she said.

"I know that people hope that they are never in a situation where they need the robes, but sometimes we find ourselves or loved ones in that situation," she said.

"Giving someone their dignity is a sincere gesture of love. I'm happy to be doing what I'm doing."