

# Provincial Care Services Agency



Angela and Monica Byrne,  
one of Provincial Care's  
founders



Registered Manager Angela  
McKeever

**D**evolution of powers away from Whitehall and Westminster has been a subject of much discussion in recent times, particularly in light of Brexit. Belfast-based Provincial Care, a domiciliary care provider, believe their predicament serves as a case study for the necessity of a government that is closer to home. The geography and demography of their area places them in a unique position that doesn't lend itself to blanket solutions. This is why Angela McKeever, Provincial Care's Registered Manager, focuses heavily on providing solutions tailored to each individual person. This is a model that began with their founders, Monica Byrne and Imelda McGrady, and has brought the company to a point where they now have 180 employees. Angela tells *The Parliamentary Review* more about what this undertaking consists of.

## The DNA of our company

Provincial Care Services Agency Limited (PCSA) was established in 1992 by Monica Byrne and Imelda McGrady. Both ladies had been employed at senior levels within the NHS in tutorial capacities, and could see that most patients in long-stay wards could, with an element of care included, have their care managed in their home environment, on their own terms and with an element of independence. The partners recognised this deficiency in the care sector, particularly within the elderly age group, and so PCSA initiated a small pilot scheme. This scheme was set up with an ideal situation in mind: a particular number of service users looked after by a

### FACTS ABOUT PROVINCIAL CARE SERVICES AGENCY

- » Registered Manager: Angela McKeever
- » Established in 1992
- » Based in Belfast, with services in Belfast Trust, Southern Trust and South Eastern Trust, Northern Ireland
- » Services: Domiciliary care
- » No. of employees: 180
- » [www.provincialcare.com](http://www.provincialcare.com)

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group of carers. What was not initially taken into account was that, among other things, some service users passed away and carers took sick leave and maternity leave, meaning that the pilot was continually changing.

Since then, we have striven relentlessly and adapted as an agency to maintain an excellent reputation by extending first-class quality care to those in our community. It's a goal that we've never compromised on and that we always keep strongly in mind. In fact, this sector in Northern Ireland has no input or voice to quantify what the true cost of an hour's care can be, so we are continually lobbying for a realistic rate in order to remunerate our workers, as they feel undervalued throughout this sector. We, however, believe that a holistic attitude towards care, in addition to intelligent use of resources, can bring a genuinely excellent service at a reasonable cost. Our service offering contains the following provisions:

- » First-class care while respecting the client's independence and privacy
- » Ensuring the training of all staff is of the highest quality

- » Carefully selected care workers to ensure that appropriate attention is given
- » Assured flexibility of services as the care requirements change
- » Regular review of service provision
- » Regular opportunity for client feedback
- » Liaison, if required, with other healthcare professionals, including GPs, social workers, community nurses and day hospitals, among others

In the early days, because of where our services were located, we could travel long distances from one service user to another – “going the extra mile” was, in many cases, a drastic understatement. Eventually, we were approached by a trust, who offered us the prospect of catering to clients who were located in urban areas. While we were keen to retain the rural element of our services, we made the decision to expand into the unknown.

## Difficulties along the way

Recruitment in this industry is not a walk in the park, as it's an occupation that's not always well remunerated or rewarded, and it can involve our carers facing challenging situations on a daily basis. Across the sector, the remuneration isn't good enough, and very often it is even poorer than the pay you'd receive in a regular retail job, as this work is often seen as menial.

To be in this industry, therefore, you have to possess a sincere desire to help people. If you do not possess this core trait, the job will not work out for you, as the negatives will quickly outweigh the positives. In other words, you have to love the job; you have to possess a passion for the job. These traits are, quite understandably, not in everyone's nature, which means that the recruitment stage requires a considerable degree of scrutiny,

Best Home Care Agency winners of 2018







We provide care that's individualised, professional, safe, compassionate and effective

including police checks and reference checks prior to a job offer. These procedures can take several weeks to finalise, by which time the potential carer might have decided to take a job in a different sector.

What's more, there is no obvious career route for those who do work in the industry. For many, it can feel like there is a lot of hard, physical, heart-rending work, with no room for progression and no prospect of gaining formal qualifications. What's desperately needed in this sector is a greater recognition of the work these carers do, as well as a way for them to get onto the career ladder. As far as I'm concerned, many of our employees could make excellent nurses, but because they have not taken the standard academic route, they are locked into a dead end. The fact that these hard-working individuals do not currently receive sufficient recognition is something that society ought to recognise and reflect on.

To help solve this problem, the government could think about allowing a sort of conversion course (perhaps equivalent to an access

course) that would not necessarily bring them out of the domiciliary care sector, as currently happens, but would allow them to proceed into another healthcare profession, such as nursing or social work. On top of this, Northern Ireland is not receiving the necessary funds that take account of the specific needs of this part of the UK. This is a clear indication that a devolution of powers is necessary. Our exit from the European Union, and the corresponding repatriation of powers, could very well be the prime opportunity for this to occur. Only a government that is in close proximity to the problems will have a sufficient grasp of the detail.

Nevertheless, we will always remain committed not to profit or to utilitarian efficiency, but to care – care that's individualised, professional, safe, compassionate, effective and takes into account the needs of the whole person. It is our duty and commitment to centre everything we do around our service users' well-being. This, ultimately, is what the community deserves.

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