

Voice of Hope

Andrew and Phyllis Rabinowitz are on a mission to ensure that the health issues of newborns are heard. **By Danielle Beurteaux**

Andrew Rabinowitz had only three words the night he called emergency services to his home: "Baby not breathing."

His daughter, Rebecca, had been born less than a week earlier, on July 13, 2006, one month premature. She spent five days in a neonatal intensive care unit before being released from the hospital. Doctors assured Rabinowitz and his wife, Phyllis, that their daughter was fine, even though she was still congested and had an audible wheeze. Despite the Rabinowitzes' concerns, doctors insisted that Rebecca had nothing more serious than a cold. "The doctors kept saying we were neurotic," says Rabinowitz, 37, the COO and CFO of Marathon Asset Management, an \$11 billion New York-based hedge fund. "I started to believe that maybe I *was* being neurotic."

Rebecca died on July 21. The Rabinowitzes later discovered that she'd had the Cocksackie virus, a common and treatable infection. As part of his grieving, Rabinowitz read everything he could find about infant mortality and spoke to as many doctors as he could in an effort to understand what had happened to his daughter. "I said, 'I can't let this happen to other families,'" he recalls. "There's something wrong when parents don't have an opportunity to be heard."

In September 2006, Rabinowitz and his wife established the R Baby Foundation (the R stands for Rebecca), based out of their Short Hills, New Jersey, home, with the mission of raising awareness and educating parents and medical professionals about newborn health. Rabinowitz cites a 2003 Centers for Disease Control study that put U.S. infant mortality at one per 141 babies, and the World Health Organization, which ranks the U.S. 36th out of 196 countries in newborn deaths.

The foundation raised \$2.5 million in its first full year. Proposals are ranked by the foundation's medical board and then funded in January and June. In 2007, R Baby awarded \$750,000 in grants; the goal for 2008 is \$500,000 to \$750,000. The Rabinowitzes personally cover 95 percent of R Baby's administration costs; fundraising covers the remaining 5 percent.

Recent projects include funding a diagnostic laboratory, named after their late daughter, at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. The facility will develop molecular tests for viruses that affect babies and children. R Baby is also funding a pilot 24-hour phone information service at the Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital of New York-Presbyterian.

Medical advisory board member Richard Polin, head of neonatology at Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital at New York's Columbia University Medical Center, says families need to be empowered to ask questions of medical professionals. He has nothing but praise for the Rabinowitzes: "They've been through this great tragedy, and they're very motivated to help other families."

In May 2007, after being contacted by R Baby, New Jersey Senate president Richard Codey introduced a bill that would require all state children's hospitals to have a permanent pediatric emergency physician. (So far the bill has not been scheduled for a hearing.)

In October the Rabinowitzes welcomed Ryder, a



healthy baby boy, into their family, joining 4-year-old son Sidney. With Rebecca's experience in mind, Andrew Rabinowitz is determined to speak for newborns.

"We want to give them a fighting chance," he says. "We want to be their voice if we can."

For more information, visit www.rbabyfoundation.org.

Founding family: Andrew and Phyllis Rabinowitz, with sons Sidney (left) and Ryder.