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I ENTERED THE field of health administration to have an impact on the delivery of healthcare services in the community. I felt that healthcare management best matched my skills and interests and would afford an opportunity to serve in a leadership role in helping to provide healthcare services to those in need.

I entered healthcare management directly out of college in 1987, as a laboratory supervisor with the Alabama region of the American Red Cross. The experience was great. It gave me the opportunity to really develop my people skills. After two years, I had the opportunity to advance to the position of assistant technical director. After two months our technical director was also promoted, and I then served as interim technical director for the remainder of that year. I continued to serve as assistant director for an additional two years

In 1990, the American Red Cross consolidated donor testing around the country. For the Alabama region it meant shifting the testing of donors to a facility in Atlanta. This resulted in the closing of the testing laboratory in Birmingham and a significant downsizing in technical services. My position was phased out; however I was given the opportunity to work in a similar capacity in Georgia. I opted to remain in

Birmingham and accept a medical technologist position with the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Hospital in its blood bank.

The experience with the blood bank gave me the opportunity to have direct patient contact and provide hands-on care for people with various medical conditions. During this time I also entered the master of public administration (MPA) program at UAB. I felt that a MPA combined with my healthcare management experience from the Red Cross and my direct patient care experience with UAB would give me greater insight into any future administrative duties.

After I completed graduate school in 1997, I found that my previous experience, while rich in healthcare functions, gave some potential employers the impression that I was too technical for other administrative positions. I then began to work with the strategic planning committee for hospital laboratories at UAB Hospital and volunteered with various policy and procedure development projects.

In early 1998, I applied for and started working in administration at UAB as a strategic planning analyst. In this role, I was responsible for providing research and analytical assistance in describing strategic conditions and making recommendations to management for specific planning strategies and tactics.

While working as an analyst, I became aware of a new startup program in town. The program—the Balm of Gilead Project—was a palliative care program based at Cooper Green Hospital, the public hospital for Jefferson County. I applied for and was accepted for the position of project administrator, responsible for the development and oversight of program operations, including strategic planning, grant compliance, and fundraising activities. Because the Balm of Gilead's patients are the poor, the uninsured, and the homeless, this is a very challenging, but rewarding, position.

My advice to anyone entering the field is to be aware of the environment you're working in and be prepared to take advantage of new opportunities.

Used with permission from *Careers in Healthcare Management: How to Find Your Path and Follow It* by Cynthia Carter Haddock, Ph.D.; Robert A. McLean, Ph.D.; and Robert C. Chapman, FACHE (Chicago: Health Administration Press, 2002) pages 54-55.

About the book:

Information and inspiration for the novice or student

The field of healthcare management offers unique challenges and rewards, both emotional and financial. This book provides healthcare management career advice including information about where managers work, the type of management positions that are available, and the skills managers need to be successful. Suggestions are offered for finding and using a mentor, pursuing graduate or continuing education, and honing management skills.

The heart of the book contains 51 profiles of healthcare managers at various career stages. In their own words, these managers describe how they prepared for their careers, what their greatest challenges have been, and what advice they would provide to new managers. These profiles illustrate the wide range of opportunities and the sense of purpose and fulfillment the healthcare administration profession has to offer.

To learn more, and to order the book, visit <http://www.ache.org/pubs/haddock.cfm>