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WITH AN INTEREST in medical school, I spent the summer after my sophomore year working in an emergency department as a volunteer. I discovered the emergency department is an amazing place where everyone there works together for one purpose—to help sick people.

I wanted to be part of such a team, but had difficulty deciding which healthcare job interested me the most. Fortunately, I realized that one position would allow me to take advantage of my inability to decide on a vocation: healthcare administrator. The administrator works with every position in a healthcare setting and serves as a leader, mediator, coordinator, and facilitator to ensure that all the members of a healthcare team work together.

I called a couple of administrators and asked them if I could come and talk with them. They encouraged me to find a major that would allow me to develop skills needed not only to be a leader, but also to run a business. Following their advice, I declared majors in health systems management and accounting. The health administration program required an internship, which taught me the importance of having a mentor, developing relationships with other administrators

through a professional society, developing my own management style, and continuing with a graduate level education.

I decided to seek a master of public health (MPH) degree for a variety of reasons. My undergraduate course work already covered many of the basic skills such as finance, management, and marketing, and I was interested in other disciplines such as health policy and epidemiology, which are incorporated into an MPH degree. I also selected a program affiliated with a medical school because I wanted more exposure to clinicians. I even lived in a medical school dorm, which gave me an appreciation for what medical students go through to become a physician.

The hardest lesson for me to learn has been self-confidence. Going from an undergraduate program at a public school in the South to a prestigious Ivy League graduate school in the Northeast was very intimidating for me. Even after I learned that I could be a successful student in this environment, the career services office had to convince me to apply for the administrative fellowship program at The Johns Hopkins Health System. However, I found that I was able to do well, and after my fellowship, I was asked to fill a position as an assistant administrator for outpatient services.

My job is unusual because it is at a huge outpatient facility, a joint venture between The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and The Johns Hopkins Hospital in inner-city Baltimore. The Johns Hopkins Outpatient Center is a 450,000 square foot facility that has approximately 1,500 patient encounters in nearly 100 subspecialty clinics on a given day. The office of ambulatory operations and practice management is responsible for all administrative, building, and clinical services.

Working here is both challenging and rewarding. The size of the organization makes it challenging to see the “big picture” when trying to deal with daily operations. Imagine the complexities of managing registration when hundreds of different combinations of insurance plans are presented each day. A joint venture means multiple bosses. This has forced me to look at every issue from the perspectives of both the physician practice manager and the hospital administrator. Academic medicine involves the continuous challenge to balance patient care, teaching, and research. As a manager of clinical operations, it is easy to lose sight of the importance of teaching and

research. However, teaching and research are what attract incredible physicians.

If you are considering a career in healthcare administration, you will find tremendous challenges. You will also find that healthcare affects every individual's quality of life; you can make a difference in how those services are delivered. A few important lessons can help you on your journey.

- *Find a compatible mission.* Find an organization that is committed to a mission that you believe is important and interesting. Don't limit your search to hospitals; health services are delivered by many organizations that need talented administrators.
- *Education.* Get the right education for your career objective. Specialize in something that will get you an entry-level job; most administrators have to work their way into a management position. Acquire strong computer skills. Knowing how to use database and spreadsheet software is an important advantage.
- *Get your foot in the door.* This is the most intimidating part of the field; however, it is not as difficult as it might seem. The key is to establish relationships. Join the professional organization for what you want to do. Make an appointment with someone who does what you want to do. Do volunteer work or an internship without expecting to get paid.
- *Be productive.* Once you are in a position, be proactive and productive. When I give a project to my staff, I usually tell them everything I know about the project in five minutes and then send them out to see what they can find out. It is always impressive when someone comes back with an attempt rather than giving up because I didn't give precise instructions. I would not send them out to work on the project if I already knew the answer. Also, don't be afraid to submit a draft to your boss. A draft allows for feedback and shows that you are being productive.

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 70-72.

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>