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WHILE DIFFICULT TO determine “The Day” I became aware health administration was for me, I did know this: I loved working with people; I desired a career that would allow me to make a difference in people’s lives; I wanted a fast-paced career that combined my interests in business, health, and policy; and lastly, I wanted to feel passionate about my work.

When pursuing an undergraduate degree in public administration, my healthcare elective courses appealed to me. I explored these interests through internships with a local health department and a newly integrated provider-owned health system. I worked on multiple outreach projects, conducted research, and lobbied for preventive care funding. I shadowed the executive-vice president of the health system in all finance, executive staff, and board meetings. These internships confirmed my desire to work in healthcare and to continue on for a graduate degree.

After applying, visiting, and being accepted to multiple graduate schools, I decided to further my education at a university where I felt most comfortable with the curriculum, alumni, and professors—The University of Alabama at Birmingham. The program was ranked in the

top ten and I felt “at home” in Birmingham. Six months later, I moved from the cold of Wisconsin to the heat of Alabama with no regrets.

While attending graduate school, I was a graduate assistant for the program director and ACHE student chapter president, and I began working part-time for a managed care organization on projects regarding physician behavior and preventive performance. These activities allowed me to apply my classroom learning and to network with individuals playing a vital role in my career. I was offered and accepted a residency with the HMO and was hired for a permanent position in marketing and member communications, considered senior management. After working with many departments including quality, compliance, sales, and operations, I was then promoted to manager of pharmacy benefits.

As manager of pharmacy benefits I found the “niche” I had been searching for. While indirectly, I felt I was helping to improve member health status by drafting communication regarding routine exams and medication compliance. I worked with the contracted pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) to implement a disease management program geared at education and prevention. I felt good about the work I was doing. Therefore, when I was offered a business development position within TeleVox Software to increase prevention and disease management awareness using innovative technology, I jumped at the opportunity.

In my current position, I work with health plans and disease management organizations nationwide to provide cost-effective, personalized reminders for preventive initiatives, such as mammograms, immunizations, and preventive screening exams. I feel more passionate about my work than ever; I respect my coworkers and believe in the mission of our company; I enjoy the commitment to prevention of our clients; and I believe at some level I am making a difference in people’s lives.

In my brief career, I feel very blessed for my opportunities and the amazing people I have met. My many mentors have proved invaluable, and I carry a part of them with me every day. I never had any intentions of ending up in the technology industry when I sought a career in healthcare. In fact, I would have laughed if someone had suggested it.

For what it is worth, this early careerist would like to offer the following advice to new persons entering the field: keep an open mind about your career path; do not be afraid to take risks; show initiative by putting yourself in a position to embrace new opportunities; network and surround yourself with mentors you believe in; treat people with respect, remembering your classmates and coworkers are colleagues; make a commitment to lifelong learning; and love your work.

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 106-108.

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>