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GROWING UP THE daughter of a surgeon and hospital administrator, I was exposed early in my life to the fields of medicine and healthcare management. I debated early in my education about attending medical school and was excited to learn about the undergraduate degree in health administration, which in my mind, married the best of both worlds and would be a better fit with my skill sets. Not knowing exactly what I wanted to become, I realized quickly that the healthcare field provided a growing, ever changing environment, within which to experiment and crystallize my career desires and goals.

I declared my major as health policy and administration at The Pennsylvania State University and began my healthcare career journey. The degree provided a unique mix of lessons in business, policy, and social sciences; it tested both my analytical and creative sides and gave me exposure to clinical and ethical curricula.

My degree also provided the opportunity to practice these lessons in a valuable internship. I was fortunate to complete this internship at the George Washington University Medical Center, which gave me my first true exposure to the field I had chosen. More than any specific

experiences that summer, I developed relationships with mentors who opened doors to many other mentors and opportunities. While he was writing my reference letter for acceptance into graduate school, one of those mentors, an assistant administrator at the medical center, told me about an opportunity at the District of Columbia Hospital Association (DCHA). After exploration, I decided to pull my application from graduate school and join the DCHA staff.

The DCHA provided one of the broadest exposures to our health-care system. It allowed me to participate firsthand in policymaking at the national and local levels. And, as a general project manager, my roles exposed me to virtually every part of healthcare, from disaster preparedness to hospital—medical staff relations to culturally sensitive communication with patients.

While my undergraduate education had prepared me for these roles exceptionally well, I quickly learned of my degree's limitation, and decided to complement it with an MBA and health services management concentration from the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University. These fabulous two years broadened my perspective of healthcare, taught me new skills and business discipline to apply to my healthcare knowledge, and strengthened my network of health-care leaders.

From Duke, I moved on to the SunHealth Alliance as an administrative resident, again broadening my network of contacts and mentors and gaining new exposures in healthcare management. I held various roles at SunHealth and later with Premier, Inc. (after merger), including managed care and strategic consultant and regional executive. These organizations provided a perfect environment to mix my healthcare and business skills.

Four years later, the American Hospital Association asked me to join its staff as director of quality and accountability, my current position. As such, I am responsible for the development, implementation, and management of products and services to improve patient care and enhance public confidence and trust in hospitals and health systems. Two primary areas of focus are on improving patient safety by reducing/preventing medication errors and improving care at the end of life in hospitals and health systems.

My biggest professional challenge has been establishing credibility in the field of clinical quality improvement without having a clinical degree, but I have found that it can be done! Counting among my colleagues, mentors, and friends so many passionate, mission-driven leaders in our field has been my greatest professional reward.

I would give the following advice to someone entering the field.

- Seek out mentorship opportunities as often as possible. Network, network, network, and follow through with those you meet. I have countless examples (as recent as this year!) of the power of a handwritten note of thanks.
- Seek out opportunities to interact with executive audiences in the field, at school functions, internships and other employment situations, and other social or alumni functions. Avoid being intimidated by their positions of authority, and realize that most are very approachable and welcome the opportunity to teach you and even learn from you. As I've noted throughout this message, our field has been characterized by strong mentorship relationships, relationships that are not often forgotten and that make lasting impressions to carry on the tradition.
- Be flexible and learn to embrace change. A positive, adaptable spirit and personality are received with open arms in this ever-changing environment. Learn to thrive on ambiguity!
- Strike an appropriate balance between being a generalist and a specialist. It never hurts to be viewed as an expert in an area, but to have a basic depth of knowledge on the broadest of healthcare issues will facilitate your flexibility and adaptability to change.

Note: Since this profile was written, Mary Mologne has left the AHA and is now senior product manager with PYXIS, a Cardinal Health company.

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 117-119.

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>