

Happiness is Growing Together

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(Formerly known as Debra Carpenter)

It's 11:00pm on Friday, November 4, 2005, and I am sitting at my new desk at Laurel Highlands Medical Consultants, Inc., a medical billing, transcription, practice management company of which I am the CEO. Tears are streaming down my face right now and in an effort to stop I catch sight of those words that start me off each day hanging on my bulletin board: **"Each of us alone is one; together we are the Professional Association of Health Care Office Management."** My mind begins to race through the events of the day and the man behind those words; the founder of PAHCOM, Richard Blanchette.

Celebrating fourteen years in business and a new expanded location, I held an open house at Laurel Highlands Medical Consultants, Inc. today. Richard flew in from Pensacola to be with me like "family" would be on all-important occasions—**together**. The pride inside of me as I introduced him to my staff, business partner, clients, business associates, and possible potential clients led me to tell the story over and over of the significant role Richard has played in the development of Laurel Highlands Medical Consultants, Inc. Of course our founder left me with an assignment to share my story with the rest of my "PAHCOM Family." In thinking about Richard's



Pictured, above: Debra Iachini, CMM, president of Laurel Highlands Medical Consultants, Inc.; below, from left to right: Anthony Dean-Neil, Richard Blanchette, Dr. Cindy Neri, D.C., and Debra Iachini, CMM.

request, I look at it not as an assignment but as another way to **share knowledge**.

I started my career in health care in 1980 working for an ENT as the office manager and medical biller. I joined PAHCOM in 1991 and successfully sat for my CMM exam in New Orleans in 1992. From that first conference, I began to build a new "family" which I would soon find would bring out the best in me both personally and professionally. Although I had the passion and drive to be a medical biller and practice manager, my current employer was stagnating my growth in the field. Growing concerns over personal health issues (increased seizure activity and fractures from genetic birth disease), coupled with a failing marriage can now be thrown into the mix.

I was visibly distraught from a phone call with my employer when Richard quietly inquired whether he could help. I poured my heart out to Richard, then and there at the annual conference in Las Vegas. Richard helped me to walk away from that conference with a vision and a plan for the future as a self employed, out-sourced medical biller.

Once home from conference I headed to the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry

to educate myself on incorporating my business, and learning the labor laws. I worked with my bank to establish a credit line before I quit my full time job. I also retained a corporate lawyer and accountant.

Today, I employ a dedicated staff of 12, who service 17 physician contracts and four pending contracts to close, as of Friday's open house, in a 2,400 square foot office. Of course, this success did not come without its ups and downs. Remembering although I was **alone**, I frequently dialed 1-800-451-9311 for help. **Together** with my mentor, Richard Blanchette, a host of "family" PAHCOM office managers across the United States, and an advisory board of directors, my business became a Sub Chapter S corporation in August of 1994, billing for one internal medicine practice out of a two room building.

My time in growing the business had to be split between doing the billing for the few accounts I had and developing myself as a business-woman. I would do all the billing at night, and during the day I was out in the medical community marketing my company, attending the local community college to educate myself in business, finance and medical, while simultaneously struggling with increasing personal health issues from the stress. I was also raising a daughter who did not understand why her mother would quit a full time, excellent paying, 9 to 5 job with benefits to work all day and night as a low paid self employed.

Attending my yearly PAHCOM conferences was always the boost I needed to keep me on course personally and professionally. I would

share knowledge with my PAHCOM "family," discuss my company concerns or issues with Richard, and bring home the latest industry updates to keep my physicians in Johnstown on the cutting edge.

Since becoming a PAHCOM member, I have never missed a conference with the exception of the 2004 conference, due to undergoing brain surgery, which finally cured me of the devastating seizures that had been challenging me daily since age 13. Although very happy to be seizure free, I can truly say that I felt the void of not seeing my PAHCOM "family" that year.

I have served my PAHCOM association on the national level as President, Secretary, and Parliamentarian; and on the Ethics Committee. I am also an Area Representative for Pennsylvania. I consider these service honors a way of thanking my PAHCOM "family" for their support in getting my healthcare career off the ground some 14 years ago and never letting me down. PAHCOM is just an e-mail, listserv question, or telephone call away to a resolution to your practice management problem.

Well, it will soon be morning and my Saturday team will be here to process claims, type the transcription, and share my passion with respect and dedication. In closing, I must thank Richard Blanchette for establishing **MY Professional Association of Health Care Office Management** so I would never walk **ALONE** in the turbulent health care industry.

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