



TAKING CARE OF OTHERS WHILE TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

By Laura Huete, MD, MBA, FACMQ, CMQ

Some kids just know what they want to do from an early age. I'm one of those fortunate few. As a young girl, I knew I wanted to be a physician and to help others become well and live healthy.

I love practicing medicine. It combines my love for science with taking care of others. Nothing deterred me from my dream, not even the demands of training and the challenges of learning how to care for others. I honestly couldn't imagine doing anything else.

I am the only physician in my family. My family gave me so much

support during my education, and I am always grateful to them for all the help they provided.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of medicine is teaching others, whether it be my own patients or with my colleagues. As Senior Medical Director at WellMed Medical Group, I have the opportunity to coach, lead and mentor in a way that is incredibly fulfilling. Having the chance to greatly impact our patient population by providing access to quality health care is an incredible privilege.

Through innovative technology, physicians like me have access



to nearly real-time information about how our patients view us and the quality of their care. This kind of scalable instant feedback wasn't imaginable more than a decade ago when I completed my medical training. With new rating systems, patients can see whether practices are rated 1 star or 5 stars, and review what other patients think of the service. It truly is the Age of the Consumer.

That is one reason I am particularly proud of my involvement last year in helping WellMed to earn the Gold Seal of Approval for Ambulatory Health Care from The Joint Commission, the nation's oldest and largest independent standards-setting and accrediting healthcare body. Additionally, The Joint Commission awarded all WellMed clinics with a Primary Care Medical Home (PCMH) Certification. Fewer than 350 medical groups in the country have attained both distinctions from The Joint Commission.

The journey to achieve these recognitions was arduous. Rigorous preparation validated WellMed's compliance with federal, state and local regulatory policies and procedures, as well as safety policies set by our affiliated healthcare companies.

The hard work paid off in several ways. WellMed experienced an 18-point jump between 2015 and 2017 in the Optum annual Patient Health and Safety Assessment, from 79 percent in 2015 to 97 per-

cent in 2017. WellMed clinics achieved this high mark even with more rigorous standards added to the assessment each year. We also realized improved communication and collaboration between departments, such as credentialing, education and training, and clinic operations.

Most importantly, the process forced us to further improve to meet our goals to promote patient safety, quality of care and efficiency of care. Like most physicians, these benchmarks are impetus for why I got into medicine. Just as importantly, we improve the overall patient experience by continually striving to achieve these goals.

Caring for others also taught me the importance of caring for myself. How can I expect my patients to be healthy if I'm not serving as an example?

Running is one of my favorite ways to do just that. I've finished five half-marathons, and I am currently training for my sixth. I also raced in two sprint triathlons. I love the physical and mental challenges of pushing my limits, yet I have to accompany the rigorous training with a healthy diet.

Living a healthy lifestyle includes keeping a daily mindfulness and gratitude practice, as well. Running is a fantastic stress reliever, making me a better-rounded person and practitioner. It shows in my attitude. My daughter and my close friends can even tell when I am overdue for a good long run!

I also make time for my family and friends by planning at least a couple of vacations annually. Experiencing other cultures, places and foods makes for a relaxing and enriching vacation. The chance to unplug and recharge also makes me a better physician for my patients and my staff when I do return to "the real world."

Balancing work and life is never easy, particularly for those of us devoted to the practice of medicine. Yet making that balance a priority is essential so we can be effective for our patients, our families, and ourselves.

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