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Is Independent Advocacy Right for Me?

Transcript of Podcast 5: Are There Jobs for Independent Advocates?

This is the **fifth** in our series of podcasts entitled **Are there jobs for patient advocates? Will someone hire me? Or is there reimbursement for advocacy?** You've identified yourself as someone who thinks that JUST MAYBE advocacy IS right for you! And because INDEPENDENT patient advocacy is a career for those with passion and compassion for others, meaning you'll probably invest your blood, sweat and tears... we want YOU to be sure that it's a good fit before you begin to invest your time, money, efforts, and emotions into carving your niche in our advocacy world...

Just like the question we tackled in our second podcast of this series having to do with whether someone can make a living by being an advocate, many possible advocates – maybe like you – when faced with the reality of having to establish a business to be an independent advocate, shift instead to wanting to know if there are actually JOBS for advocates – where someone will pay them to be the advocate they want to be, or reimburse them for their work with clients?

The short answer is – yes and no. as follows.

Let's consider that statement – pay you to be the advocate you want to be....

First – the answer is partially dependent on your definition of "the way you want to do it" – and we're going to assume, although YES, I do know what "they" say – we're going to assume the kind of advocate you want to be is someone who is focused solely on better outcomes for the patient you work with. We actually have a term for this in professional advocacy... we call it the Allegiance Factor, which says that an advocate's allegiance is focused on whoever is providing the paycheck.

So, say you get a job as a patient advocate in a hospital or with an insurer or pharmaceutical company, any company with a profit interest... they will constrain what you can do – they will limit the services you can provide because they will limit what they are willing to spend, and that means your allegiance is then to one of those organizations and NOT to the patient. I have to ask, "Is that the way you want to do advocacy?"



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On the other hand, if you work independently, hired directly by a patient or caregiver, then ethically you are doing what needs to be done for that patient-client – but of course, that's not employment – that's SELF-employment. You're running your own business. But then you can also do advocacy the way you want to do it.

Now – there are employers who are NOT healthcare profiteers who hire advocates. But they are very few and far between. We know of one union in Las Vegas who has a full time patient advocate on staff. Her only job is to serve the union's members. We also know of some employers who have hired advocacy companies, but like hospitals, insurers, and pharmaceutical companies, those large advocacy companies don't allow their employees to focus solely on the patient's needs.

And so, what we are left with is self-employment. In order to serve the client the way the client needs help, and in the thorough and objective, heart-focused method you wish to, then yes, you must be self-employed. You must start your own practice.

Which takes us to the question about reimbursement... Many times new advocates think "oh – it would be great if insurance reimbursed for advocacy!" – but now, based on what you know about the Allegiance Factor, can you see why that might not be true?

In fact, the minute any organization, like an insurer, or Medicare or Medicaid, or any payer reimburses for advocacy, then Allegiance is no longer focused on the patient or client. There is an example of this – of reimbursement - where primary care doctors are being reimbursed by Medicare for patients with multiple health problems – called comorbidities... they are reimbursed \$30 a month for providing advocacy. Really? \$30? And those people think they have an advocate? Do you see the limits being imposed? I certainly do, and when sizing that up next to --quote – advocacy the way you want to do it - unquote – I see no relationship whatsoever.

So – the answer is – for all intents and purposes, NO, there is no reimbursement for advocacy and frankly, from my perspective, I don't see it happening to allow patients to get what they need. In fact, you can think of it this way.... A favorite metaphor of mine:

If you are suddenly thrown into jail, who do you want to bail you out, and prepare you for your trial? Do you want a public defender who is paid by the same government who threw you in jail to begin with? Or do you want someone who you would hire privately, independent of the penal system, whose sole allegiance is to you and making sure YOU get what YOU need.



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Yea – I thought so.

So – back to our yes or no answer on whether there are jobs. YES – there are jobs in advocacy, but the chances are excellent they would constrain your ability to do the work you want to do, to provide the services you want to provide, to clients.

So – NO – there are no jobs, per se, in patient advocacy and care management that allow you to be the advocate YOU want to be except those you create yourself through your self-employed efforts.

On the one hand, we know that is disappointing to you if you had hoped you wouldn't have to start your own practice. I know it seems like an overwhelming task!

On the other hand, we also know that if you are determined to provide services the way you know patients need them, and that you are capable of providing, then you also know where to turn to get the information you need to get started – The Alliance of Professional Health Advocates. That's OUR role... making that overwhelming sounding task seem less so – making it seem not just doable, but exciting at the prospect, too.

If you are already an APHA member – hooray! You might want to go pull out that freebie booklet you probably downloaded when you first joined, your checklist for starting an advocacy practice... If you can't get your hands on it right away, then link to your membership Dashboard. Right there you'll find an icon for a gift – click on that to find your free download.

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