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## **Is Independent Advocacy Right for Me?**

### **Transcript of Bonus Podcast: Questions You Should Be Asking to Help You Decide if Independent Advocacy is a Good Choice for You**

We've looked at some of the many decision-maker questions that advocates think to ask as they consider independent advocacy: We've reviewed some of the dozens of services an advocate might provide, we've talked about whether you can actually make a living – a range of charges and other financial considerations, we've considered experience and education, including certification, we've reviewed the overview of how patients find you to work with you, and finally the availability, or lack thereof, of employer-type jobs.

For this bonus podcast, we're going to try something very different. Just what questions DON'T potential advocates think to ask that may influence the choice of advocacy or care management as a profession? In this case, we can't provide answers because everyone's answers would be very different. You'll see why as I begin to ask them – you'll want to answer them for yourself.

First let me ask you some questions about you: your personality and your regard for important aspects of being a good advocate... Such as: are you a people person? Do you truly enjoy working with people? Are you a good listener? Are you empathetic? Are you trustworthy? Are you patient? A Confident communicator? And do you have a thick skin?

You'll need to look inside yourself for honest answers to those questions. A "no" for any of them would suggest that advocacy is not the right career for you.

The next group of questions is actually a sampler of questions because there are 16 different questions in this group. Later in this podcast I'm going to tell you how to get ahold of this entire assessment quiz on determining whether advocacy in any form would be a good choice for you.

This group of questions regards your advocacy skill set: Do you understand how the health care system works? Both care AND cost? Do you understand how health insurance works – that is, if you'll be working in the US. That one's not so important if you live and will work in Canada or another country, of course. How about your knowledge of HIPAA and other privacy



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legislation? Are you a creative problem solver? Again – these are just some of a group of related questions.

Our next group of questions regards ethics and allegiance – you’ll remember we talked about the Allegiance Factor in podcast #5 – We like to think that private advocacy is among the MOST ethical of professions. In fact, it’s so important that you cannot be certified as an advocate without understanding it. Among the ethical tenets is transparency. You must be willing to be an open book with your clients as you work with them – so – is that something you’ll be able to be and do?

Finally, some more practical questions for you and again, your answers will differ from someone else’s: Because you’ll be starting your own business and eventually you will have to quit your current job to do that, do you have enough money in the bank to carry you over for maybe six months or a year? And what about the start up costs? These will vary from advocate to advocate, but taking into account everything from office space to liability insurance, you’re going to need a minimum of several thousand dollars, and you may need up to \$20 or \$25 thousand.

Further about details... Are you good at time tracking? And record keeping?

Finally– one of the seemingly simplest of questions can become a real hurdle for many, including those who have fantastic advocacy skills... It’s a doing-business question. Can you ask for a signature on a contract, and then for money? Even if you can do everything else about advocacy without missing a beat, if you can’t ask for a contract, discuss costs with a client, and ask to be paid – then you can’t be successful in business for yourself.

Now – I may have shocked you with that question, so let me soften that blow a little bit... Helping you learn to ask for contract signatures and then ask for money – those are both things we, through APHA, can teach you to do. It will certainly take some effort on your part, but we can teach you the least difficult, and best ways to make it happen and – a promise – once you’ve done it a couple of times, it may actually seem quite easy! But you have to be willing to learn, willing to practice, and be willing to follow other steps to help you start and grow your practice.

Because – here at the end of this podcast series, I’m here to tell you we WANT YOU TO SUCCEED. Let me repeat that. We want you to succeed! Our goal, as The Alliance of



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Professional Health Advocates, is to create a workforce of quality and compassion-driven advocates to serve the patients who need them. That INCLUDES YOU!

All that to say – yes – these are important questions to ask. But you can also expect that if there are holes in your knowledge or abilities, then APHA will help you fill them.

I mentioned a few minutes ago that these questions are just some of a bigger body of questions. Those questions can be found in a book called *So You Want to Be a Patient Advocate? Choosing a Career in Health or Patient Advocacy* – available to you and cited on the page that follows up this podcast.

Thanks for listening! This is the last podcast in our series called *Is Independent Advocate Right for Me?*

We hope you've learned something useful throughout the series!

We hope you heard us LOUD AND CLEAR that we want you to decide to become an advocate... but we also hope you see through this series that we don't want to sugarcoat the process. It's hard work. It takes heart, commitment, and lots of elbow grease... but as you watch yourself progress, and as you experience the gratitude of those patients and caregivers you will help, you will find it to be THE most rewarding experience you've undertaken in your entire life. MOST rewarding.

Please feel free to return at any time to any of these podcasts, and of course, should you have questions – and if you are an APHA member – you can reach out at any time to Member Services, or through the Connect Discussion Forum. We'll keep the light on for you.

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