

# LINDA LEMON-STEINER

Doctors Hospital  
OF SARASOTA



**S**he's the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Doctors Hospital of Sarasota but has never forgotten her roots. "Being a nurse, I was connected with the patients and I've never disconnected." Prior to becoming COO she was Chief Nursing Officer which she admits kept her up at night. A COO's challenges are "equally intense, although with different connections legally and professionally... I'm more in the public eye; things are more political."

## “CODE BLUE!”

The emergency team explodes into an ordinary hospital room to discover a woman, who had been admitted for an unrelated condition, delivering her baby very prematurely. As the emergency room physician pronounces the baby stillborn, the young nurse who called the code blue because there was no time for the OB/GYN to make it from home to the hospital in time, notices movement.

When she draws this to the physician's attention, a disagreement ensues. The adamant young nurse insists and prevails. The baby is alive. Today there is a 29-year-old man thriving somewhere in the world because of the actions of Linda Lemon-Steiner.

Linda has moved on to become Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Doctors Hospital of Sarasota, which she describes as requiring many of the same skills she employed as a nurse and chief nursing officer. "Being a nurse, I was connected with the patients and I've never disconnected. Chief nursing duties kept me up at night; anything that happened on my watch was my responsibility. A COO's challenges are equally intense, although with different connections legally and professionally. As COO I'm more in the public eye; things are more political."

In transitioning from Chief Nursing Officer to COO, Linda explains, "I had to learn how to disconnect from nursing and deal with my own loss of relationship with the nurses and no longer having direct interaction with the patients. Now I must consider all ramifications, both clinical and non-clinical. As COO I'm closer to the organization and must look at the business impact."

Describing her management style as adaptive and participative, Linda says she "plays different roles in different situations. I try to find a connection with a diversity of individuals and adjust to communicate effectively with each."

Adjustments have always played a role in Linda's life. Early on as a single mother with two children, Linda worked full time while studying for her Masters in Public Health at USF, which necessitated a daily 72 mile round trip commute from Crystal River to Tampa. "I had little time to spend with my children, let alone enjoy a healthy, balanced life."

When HCA was building a psychiatric facility across the street, she applied for a position, even though she had no psych experience. "I was hired for teaching quality assurance, utilization review and medical staff credentialing. Seven months later I was promoted to Chief Nursing Officer." Later Linda spent seven years working in an Orlando psychiatric hospital before moving on to a medical/surgical HCA facility.

Linda continues teaching classes at National Louis University (Orlando), Lake Erie College of Medicine (Manatee) and USF School of Nursing. "I love mentoring and enriching lives."

Her own life is enriched by her three children: Holly, who is studying medicine;

Chip, who is with the U.S. Navy in Norfolk; and Ami, wife, mother and student at age 30; and by her two grandchildren, Zach and Elena. "I encourage them to be passionate but not to sacrifice."

Linda's passions run deep. Born and raised in a quiet town in rural Michigan, Linda received her BS in health administration from Western Michigan University and her degree in nursing from Southwestern Michigan College. She also raised and trained Arabian show horses. Eventually, Linda felt the area was not a good environment for the horses and looked to both Arizona and Florida, where I had family. I chose Florida because I was familiar with it and wanted to be near the water."

"I now play as hard as I work," says Linda. "I laugh more and at myself. I used to run marathons, but now play golf. I plan ahead for the weekend. I need something to look forward to."

Looking forward professionally, Linda describes how economics are causing a dramatic increase in charity care through the ER, more than twice last year. "More underinsured are coming through the ER because they ignore symptoms until the situations become desperate. Consumers are getting older and I wonder if there will be enough caregivers. Healthcare givers need to address this to insure their ability to adjust workers and keep them in the workplace. Children of aging consumers also need to be taught innovative ideas for making difficult choices."

Linda is doing her part to insure this happens. She is a Fellow and Regent for Northern and Western Florida with the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE); serves on the boards of both West Florida and North Florida ACHE, the Executive Women's Golf Association; is a diplomat in the American Board of Quality Assurance and Utilization Review Physicians; and is chairperson for the 2009 Go Red for Women Luncheon.

Yet, Linda still finds time for travel. Her most life altering adventure was in Africa, where "I changed my view of poverty. I learned, though the indigenous people were poor in material things, they were rich in culture. They speak four or five languages and generously share one-half of what little they do possess. Children requested pencils and books, not money. They wanted knowledge and a connection. African people—not exotic animals or Kilimanjaro—changed me."

Linda claims to be most proud that she has "created an environment for people to be better tomorrow than they are today. I love what I do; I'm charged up and fortunate, but I never forget everything is tied to the patient."

Her advice to women: "Choose professions and significant relationships with equal measures of passion and good judgment. Women wear too many hats; we're over-achievers. If you work hard, play hard." ❁

Story by Virginia Sirocky  
Images: Andrea Hillebrand