



# Riding into the Future

Despite the Odds, Gary Duehring Finishes First

er, patient advocate, administrator and mentor – not to mention his approach to endurance training.

A serious athlete in his own right, Dr. Duehring, 56, has over his lifetime completed 31 marathons, seven Ironman triathlons, and countless international distance triathlons and road races. He was training 20-plus hours a week and in excellent physical health until Mother's Day in 1990. "I was 75 miles into a bike ride with my buddies when I felt a tightness in my chest. I thought it was due to dehydration so I drank some water. The next thing I knew, I went down like a ton of bricks, passed out on the ground."

Talk about endurance. Dr. Duehring climbed back up on his bike, rode home and got ready for work. "But I couldn't shake that sweaty, clammy feeling. I couldn't get warm or catch my breath, so I asked one of the coronary nurses to put leads on me. That led to coronary angiography and a biopsy of my heart wall." The diagnosis? A myocardial infarction. "Everyone was shocked I'd had a heart attack because of my athletic record."

The culprit was a flu virus. "When you're working out as much as I was, a virus like that can reside in the myocardium and block off coronary vessels. Fortunately, the coronary insult had not perforated the entire wall thickness. But my heart muscle was traumatized, and my left anterior wall wasn't functioning properly." When a patient is in good shape and has a "healthy" heart, it can be difficult to diagnose the problem, said Dr. Duehring. "Low resting heart rates, common in endurance athletes, can be indicators for pacemakers in the normal population."

"Being on the receiving end of health care was a completely new venue [for me]," he said. "You're trying to guess what's going on and use the knowledge you've acquired, but I had to forget everything I knew and let the doctors take care of me." Not easy for someone with his medical background.

By Kristina Anderson, Contributing Writer



Gary Duehring

Ask Gary Duehring what it was like to race with Lance Armstrong, and he doesn't mince words. "They talk about individuals who are world class, outstanding athletes ... well, Lance is in a class all by himself." Mr. Armstrong, Dr. Duehring said, is an individual who doesn't settle for what others think or expect of him. "He expects far more of himself, and that kind of mentality speaks volumes. We should always expect more from ourselves," he added.

It is this philosophy that has propelled Gary Duehring, Ph.D., R.T.(R)(MR), CRA, through his career as a health care provid-

Today Dr. Duehring is chief operations officer of the MRI Diagnostic Centers of Michigan, for Flint Health System Imaging, a consortium of three hospitals. He got his start, however, in nursing. “I was working at St. Joseph’s Hospital in a nursing program, but realized it wasn’t really what I wanted to do. I was more interested in the diagnostic aspect [of patient care], so I attended the hospital’s school of radiography, sat for my exams and received my R.T. certification.”

He worked for years as a radiologic technologist until that fateful day in 1990. Two weeks after his MI, he returned to work but with severe restrictions: no stairs, no walking, no physical activity. “I’m not one to sit around and do nothing,” he said, “but I had to let the virus run its course and let the myocardium heal. When you’ve been as physically active as I was and then stop, your body goes into a chemical depression. It craves the endorphins that are no longer there, and goes through a withdrawal, which is probably more traumatic than the injury itself.”

He continued to recover, and three months later got the OK from his cardiologist to run a 10-mile race, with the agreement that he would start at the back of the race and stay there. The next day, on the front page of the paper was a photo of Dr. Duehring dead center in the middle of the race. “I was busted,” he laughed.

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Reduced workouts meant more time on his hands, so Dr. Duehring decided to go back to school. He received a master’s degree in health administration from Central Michigan University and a doctorate in hospital and health administration at Columbia Southern University in Alabama, all while working full time.

“Here’s what we did: I talked to my coworkers, and together we contacted Central Michigan University to see if some professors would come to Flint and teach classes twice a week. They agreed, and following that pilot program for two-and-a-half years, 20 of us graduated with master’s degrees, and now, CMU has a satellite school here in Flint.” Dr. Duehring said Central was one of the first universities to have a network of satellite campuses. For his role in its creation, he was awarded the first CMU Alumni Recognition Award.

Dr. Duehring is past president of the Michigan Society of Radiologic Technologists and has served on its board for eight years. “I became involved with the MSRT to ensure the continuation of educational opportunities such as seminars for technologists, and it grew from there. Currently I’m the editor of *Technically Speaking*, our affiliate’s journal, and chair the Legislative and Guidelines Committees.”

But his influence and advocacy efforts don’t stop there. Dr. Duehring has served for the past six years as the Region 6 MR delegate to the ASRT House of Delegates. He currently is the Region 6 coordinator and serves the ASRT on the R.T. Advocacy Committee that helps affiliates establish grass-roots lobbyists for patients’ right to quality radiologic health care through the Consumer Assurance of Radiologic Excellence bill.

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# profile



“While we seek professional recognition for R.T.s, it’s not just about recognition or monetary gains. It’s about doing something for people. The quality of patient care is more important than the bottom line.”

ity of patient care is more important than the bottom line. By our efforts as technologists, patients are able to be cared for properly. As radiographers, we are at the front end of appropriate care.”

Health care provider. Athlete. Patient advocate. Administrator. And on top of all that, mentor. “I am one of those

people who can really focus energy and passion, and I have always felt an earnest need to mentor new members of our profession and the community at large. I give a lot of time to my professional organization; I believe in our ethical responsibilities, especially as a patient advocate,” he said.

He also believes it is his role and that of “older” radiographers to mentor those coming into the profession. It’s about attitude, the right work ethic and enthusiasm. “If we set ourselves up as mentors, are enthused about what we’re doing and why we went into the profession, then we can pass that on to the younger people coming in. They are our future. We have to help them, mentor them and support their introduction into our profession.”

As for how he has adapted to the changes in his lifestyle, Dr. Duehring said he is eating better and his physical workouts now include bike riding, resistance training, swimming and walking. Lots of walking. “I might jog a little if I’m out on a four-day bike ride and want a break, but I don’t run like I used to. Since my heart attack, that free feeling I had when I ran isn’t there anymore.”

Chances are, though, he’s still miles ahead of us all. ♦

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