



# Cindy Pezza—Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

She brings a no-nonsense approach to improving podiatry practices.

BY HAL ORNSTEIN, DPM

The details of Cindy's Pezza's professional journey are not known to many. Her saga began in the fall of 2000, in Stoughton, MA, when a woman suffering with heel pain made an appointment with a young podiatrist named Dr. Scott M. Aronson. After completing a successful course of treatment, the patient returned to the office for an annual recheck and discovered that the practice was looking to hire a receptionist/medical assistant. Given her experience in the medical field and her less than satisfactory current employment situation, the patient decided to apply and was hired shortly after.

Fast forward to the fall of 2002. The practice is continuing to grow and is preparing to move to a larger office space. Since additional help would be needed during the move and upon settling in after, the doctor asks his receptionist/medical assistant if she knows anyone who would have interest in taking a temporary position. In fact, she did. Her daughter Cindy, who at the time was not working, had two small children, exceptional organization skills, and clinical medical experience agreed to take the position. Little did Cindy know of the impact that accepting this temporary position would have on her future.

Cindy's previous experience in the medical field came about somewhat ironically as it was primarily



Cindy Pezza

due to a fear of losing her health insurance between semesters in college. She was always an excellent student who excelled in languages and writing and graduated very close to the top of her high school class. Following two semesters in college, with little financial support available, Cindy found herself in need of taking some time off to regroup before making a plan for the future.

As you may recall, back then, kids weren't allowed to stay on their parents' health insurance until their late 20s regardless of student status, so Cindy decided to enroll in a

cost-effective medical assisting certification course that would allow her to remain a full-time student while waiting tables to save towards enrollment at UMass Dartmouth the following fall. I believe that it was during these years that Cindy established her incredible work ethic as well as her knack for customer service and efficiency. In fact, for those who have been privileged enough to hear her lecture, she often works in concepts such as "table turnover" and relates them to effective practice scheduling.

Following the move, Cindy was asked to stay on as a part-time employee. She agreed, but only with the notion that she would work primarily at the front desk. According to Cindy, "back then the idea of seeing and touching feet was not something I wished to explore," but after a short time she began to feel differently and became increasingly involved in patient care. She relates, "I was amazed at how so many patients arrived in pain and left with a smile. You just don't get that with other medical specialties." It was this realization that led her to want to learn more about the practice of podiatry and how the doctor and his team could further improve the satisfaction of patients.

By 2004, it was apparent to Dr. Aronson that Cindy was motivated to learn, and so he sent her to her very first practice management meeting (AAPP in Pittsburgh). This is

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where I had the pleasure of meeting Cindy for the first time. It perhaps was not a typical first impression but according to Cindy it would be one she would never forget. Ask her and she'll tell you, "I had just arrived at the hotel when I saw a small man in a white bathrobe with a bath towel wrapped around his head. He was standing at the front desk giving out bags of candy and conversing with the reception staff. They all responded warmly and seemed to know him. I stood there for a few moments as I waited for the elevator and watched as hotel guests (speakers and attendees of the meeting I had yet to meet) approached him with hugs and words of kindness. I had never seen anything like it. Little did I know who that man in the bathrobe would turn out to be or what an effect he would have on my life."

Throughout the conference, I noticed how intently Cindy paid attention to each lecture, took pages of notes, and connected with other attendees. Although she was relatively new to the field and the organization, she seemed to find her place easily. Her ability to comprehend both clinical and managerial content allowed her to return home and immediately become a more valuable employee and source of motivation for growth and improvement in the practice. Whether she realized it or not, something inside her had changed and would serve as the impetus for the positive impact she would have on our field.

After working diligently to obtain experience in both clinical and clerical aspects of the practice, in 2005 Cindy traveled to Atlantic City, NJ to obtain her Podiatric Medical Assistant Certification. If you ask her she will be sure to tell you that she was the second in her group to complete the exam (and yes, she will also tell you that she received the highest score). For the next few years, Cindy worked full-time in the practice, moving from the front office to back office lead, and eventually to office manager, all the while working closely with her physician employer to improve patient compliance and

outcome and to increase revenue.

She maintained her connections in the practice management arena and was not only attending, but lecturing at state and national meetings from coast to coast and Canada. Her ability to connect with podiatric professionals at all levels was refreshing. Cindy could effectively educate support staff while connecting with experienced administrators and physicians with confidence. Not long after entering the lecture circuit, she began receiving emails and phone calls

time practice management consultant and coach. Just as December, 2011 was coming to an end, Pinnacle Practice Achievement was born.

Since that time Cindy has become a pillar of the podiatric community. Early on she focused on work with existing practices, to assist with protocols and systems development, staff training, improving quality of patient care, and increasing revenue. As the climate of healthcare posed additional challenges, Cindy responded by expanding her scope of prac-

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from podiatrists throughout the country requesting that she help them improve their practices. Although unsure at this time of how to facilitate the idea, Cindy knew she had found her calling as a practice management consultant.

At first, Cindy began helping one or two practices at a time. She would probably be embarrassed to say that many of her initial clients reaped the benefit of her new-found calling and generosity as she would often forget to send invoices. By early 2010, Cindy was beginning to feel the pressure of managing a busy podiatry practice and traveling quite frequently. To add to the mix, she was also coaching her daughter's Pop Warner cheering squad, volunteering time to speak for residents and podiatry students, and trying to help as many practices as she could in her "spare time." It was at this point that she began to think more seriously about the future, her passion for improving practices, and most importantly about the quality of her family life.

Cindy's children have always been her top priority—regardless of the demands of her professional life. In late 2011, Cindy made one of the most difficult decisions of her life and gave her notice to leave her position as office manager to become a full-

time by working intricately with physicians to develop checks and balances in every aspect of practice, from scheduling and receivables management to keeping overhead costs at bay. As demand for services increased, Cindy responded by creating a convenient and affordable online subscription service that would provide physicians access to the tools required for diagnosing individual practice roadblocks, thus helping them to achieve their goals. This innovative and invaluable concept, Pinnacle's Practice Engagement Program (PEP), was launched in 2018 and continues to grow.

Staying relevant and keeping current with changes and challenges faced by podiatrists every day has proven to be a great asset, not only to existing practices but also to the dozens who have utilized Cindy's experience and guidance to hang their own shingle. No other practice management consultant comes close to possessing the inane sense and intuition to assist in every step of crafting a practice from scratch. From the day Cindy realized her calling, she has worked diligently, displayed integrity, and demonstrated a kind of dedication to the betterment of our field that is second to none. Her ability

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to remain approachable and reliable continues to amaze me and so many others whose practices and lives she has enlightened. Her straight-forward approach is exactly what physicians need to improve not only their practices, but also their lives.

Throughout the years, I have watched from the wings as she commanded an audience via conference room or conference call and have had the pleasure of lecturing alongside her. To sit back and watch as Cindy develops the concept for an entire conference, authors the titles and descriptions of each lecture, and then proceeds to present with enthusiasm for hours on end is somewhat mind-blowing. Cindy's passion for what she does is equally as evident no matter who she is speaking with, whether it be a struggling podiatry student, conflicted resident, seasoned physician, or staff member in need of a little extra help. Her ability to connect with individuals in every aspect of our profession from vendors to executive directors is unparalleled. The type A personality does not do Cindy justice as only A+ will do. Those who have learned from her and have been smart enough to have

become thoughtful, caring adults and as her life continues to be filled by friends, family, and rescue dogs who truly love her. I am so proud to pay her tribute as she is so deservingly inducted into the *Podiatry Management* Podiatry Hall of Fame. Congratulations "Cinder", I love you!

of podiatric medicine, and residency programs in every corner of our country and even into Canada. Her audiences are not only entertained by her unique and brilliant sense of humor, but also leave with invaluable information that they take home to improve their offices, and ultimately,

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## Tributes

### Jeffrey D. Lehrman, DPM

Cindy is the best in the country at what she does. No one else can spend fifteen minutes in a podiatry practice and make a list of 75 things that can be done to improve its systems and functions. Cindy can evaluate our staff, our billing, tell us if we have the correct number of offices, build both front and back office protocols, and so much more. This knowledge comes from so many

their lives. With her knowledge and the services that she offers, she has improved the lives of so many of our colleagues. Given the impact she has had on so many of us and the service she provides to our profession, Cindy is a model candidate for induction to the *Podiatry Management* Podiatry Hall of Fame, and this honor is much deserved and appropriate.

### Mark S. Isenberg, DPM

I have had the good fortune to have met Cindy Pezza at a conference about four years ago. She was presenting lectures over many days at a meeting that usually was devoted to surgery. I was amazed by her ability to present on complex topics from treatment protocol development to receivables management in a way that was easy to understand. I knew this was someone I needed to get to know as her knowledge of podiatry and our profession is not only impressive but inspiring.

I did in fact hire her for assistance with my practice. My only regret is that I had not met her years before. I find that she brings enthusiasm as well as a no-nonsense approach to the future of our profession. I have been in practice for many years and came to realize that the old ways are not going to work anymore and that a fresh approach to practice is what is needed.

Over the years since that first meeting, I continue to be impressed by Cindy's remarkable ability to pass

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hired her know that her no-nonsense approach to improving patient care first, and in turn the bottom line, is exactly what the doctor ordered.

I am honored to be able to say, "I knew her when" and it gives me great joy with each passing year to watch her not only meet but exceed her personal and professional goals. As much as I have influenced her to become the woman she is today, she has inspired me in more ways than I can explain. I am so happy to watch as her children, Caity and Cameron,

years of working in and managing podiatry offices, and now spending time helping so many practices around the country. Cindy has a matter-of-fact, down-to-earth, no-nonsense approach that is appreciated by her friends and clients. She has chosen to share this knowledge not only with her clients, but also with thousands of our colleagues who have attended her countless numbers of lectures and workshops.

Cindy chooses to share her expertise at podiatry conferences, colleges





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on knowledge and guide us towards the future. Through her many contacts, she has compiled an awesome network of people to help each and every one of us. She is constantly on the go, not only helping existing physicians but attempting as well to shape future DPMs by presenting valuable information at the colleges of podiatric medicine.

**Jennifer L. Somers, DPM**

Cindy Pezza of Pinnacle Practice Achievement is one of the finest human beings I have ever met. Almost four years ago, I made the decision to open my own practice and she has been there to help guide me every step of the way. I felt comfortable with Cindy from the first moment I introduced myself to her as, quite honestly, a pretty seasoned yet scared practitioner. I believe I would have completely fallen on my face and given up several times over the last few years without her. Cindy has always been there for me with a listening ear, words of wisdom, and a game plan to fix everything. She set me up for success with office protocols, office policies, and procedures, and has taught me to be a more thorough and comprehensive practitioner, all the while being much more profitable. Cindy has helped me grow and mature as a practitioner and has helped me to become a better businessperson. She has taught me that it's okay to take myself out of my comfort zone and how much that can actually help my practice grow and evolve. I can honestly say that my world is a much better place because I have Cindy in it. Over the last four years, she has become more than a practice management advisor; she has become a dear friend. I couldn't be any prouder of my friend and colleague today as she is being inducted into the *Podiatry Management* Podiatry Hall of Fame.

**Naghmeh Lilly Khavari, DPM**

Cindy is a true definition of a leader. She is kind, passionate, and resourceful. After years of contemplating opening my own practice, I was lucky enough to be introduced

to her. Not only did she help me find a suitable location, but she mentored me through the stress and anxiety of being clueless about where to start on opening a new practice and building it from the ground up. She listened to the way I practiced and helped me develop multiple protocols in addition to helping me train my staff. She does not use a cookie cutter formula; instead she looks at each podiatrist individually and helps them build a practice based on their agenda and goals. I am where I

haps what is most important about Cindy is that she understands how to help physician practices function in today's medico-economic environment. There is a fine line between providing the right care for patients and making sure that the practice is profitable, and she truly "gets it." After obtaining nearly a decade of experience working in multiple capacities in a successful podiatry practice in Massachusetts and then launching her own consulting firm in 2011, she has learned and taught many physi-

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**—Shapero**

am today because of her advice, resources, and guidance. She is an outstanding businesswoman and a great friend. She is a library of knowledge and is a true problem solver. Her experience and personality, as well as her extensive knowledge of our profession, has helped me thrive in my practice in just under two years.

**Shawna Shapero, Bako Diagnostics**

We have appreciated Cindy's work for many years as she has served the podiatric medical community. Her dedication and passion in the podiatric practice management arena is inspiring. Cindy actively seeks and acts upon information that is important to today's podiatric clinician. Her work embodies our mission to advance the podiatric profession, and the role of dermatology within it. Our sincere congratulations to Cindy as she is recognized for her leadership and commitment to podiatry.

**Ira H. Kraus, DPM**

I met Cindy nearly 14 years ago through my involvement with the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. She was just joining the lecture circuit as a non-physician and I was immediately taken by her interpersonal skills and ability to understand practice management and workflow specific to podiatry. Per-

haps what is most important about Cindy is that she understands how to help physician practices function in today's medico-economic environment. There is a fine line between providing the right care for patients and making sure that the practice is profitable, and she truly "gets it." After obtaining nearly a decade of experience working in multiple capacities in a successful podiatry practice in Massachusetts and then launching her own consulting firm in 2011, she has learned and taught many physi-

cians and staff members that if you do the right thing and keep quality patient care as the primary focus, you can also make a great living and have a good quality of life. As past APMA President and someone who has been speaking for almost 25 years, I have been very impressed with the way that Cindy resolves volatile situations. She possesses values and ethics that help make her an incredible individual and her compassion, caring and concern for our profession are qualities that I wish all of my colleagues possessed. Today it is very difficult to find someone who has the honesty, integrity and commitment to success that Cindy Pezza possesses. **PM**



**Dr. Hal Ornstein** is Founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the New Jersey Podiatric Physicians and Surgeons Group, LLC; President of Podiatric Super Group Management, LLC; Managing Partner of Affiliated

Foot and Ankle Center, LLP and Chairman of the Institute for Podiatric Excellence and Development and was Past President of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. In 2009, he was honored to receive induction to the Podiatry Hall of Fame and received the *Podiatry Management Magazine* Lifetime Achievement Award.