

"My personal Health Assistant Karen played the biggest role in resolving my issues. If not for her, I would be still struggling with pain."



About Accolade

Accolade is an on-demand healthcare concierge for employers, health plans, health systems and consumers. Our team of compassionate, exceptional professionals is supported by breakthrough science and technologies to guide people through the healthcare system in a deeply personalized manner. By taking the time to get to know each person, understand the context of their healthcare decisions, build trust and influence decisions, we deliver industry-leading engagement levels, satisfaction scores unseen in healthcare, better health outcomes, and cost savings of more than 10 percent.

For more information, visit www.accolade.com.

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MARY'S STORY

The Joy Is Back



Mary Reese had always been a private person. Don't talk about the pain. Keep the worries to yourself. Endure what must be endured, as quietly as you can.

She loved her life as the wife of a Comcast NBCUniversal Director of Technology in West Covina, CA. She loved their son and the garden they shared — the corn they grew, the peppers with which her husband, Marcus, makes his famous hot sauce. She tried to ignore the back pain she'd had since 1992. She tried even harder, after 2002, when the pain worsened following a fall.

Challenged by her son to take the kinds of hard tests he was taking in school, she even got a real estate license and sold three homes.

But the pain worsened. Mary's mobility shut down. For years she kept her anguish to herself.

"I was like many people, trying to deal with my condition by myself," she recalls. "But over time, I grew less capable of handling it all on my own. The pain was always there. I grew disorganized. I couldn't manage all the healthcare paperwork."

In early 2011, Mary placed a first call to Accolade, seeking help in locating an in-network provider for a planned procedure — a rhizotomy — that would hopefully lessen some of her pain. That one call led to a relationship that grew over time and became especially critical in August 2014, when Mary began experiencing changes to her vision.

Karen Alkire, an Accolade Health Assistant®, took the call. Clearly it was not just the floaters in her eye that were troubling Mary, but this long, unresolved journey with Mary's back pain — 'my struggle,' as Mary calls it. *I'd like to put you in touch with Mary Agnes, an Accolade Clinical Health Assistant*, Karen told Mary. Mary agreed

to talk. Though the vision troubles resolved on their own within three weeks, a meaningful relationship had been forged.

With Karen providing assistance in scheduling appointments, managing claims, and estimating surgical costs, Mary Agnes, registered nurse, probed to learn what else might be done on Mary's behalf.

"Over time, I grew less capable of handling it all on my own."

"Mary just could not get ahead of the pain," Mary Agnes says. "Her life had become a routine of stretching, warm baths, analgesics, ibuprofen, TENS, and topical cream — but little was working. She couldn't go out and see her girlfriends or pursue her real estate career. She couldn't even get her hair done. She'd had a history of treatments, but she was still in terrible pain."

"I was losing the ability to walk and using a cane," Mary says. "At one point my husband suggested a wheelchair, but I couldn't fathom that. At times, I wanted to give up. It was a terribly lonely time."

And then one day Karen had an idea. "I'd just attended a training program on a new Comcast benefit called Grand Rounds," Karen recalls. "Grand Rounds offers employees access to the ideas and opinions of the top one-percent specialists in the nation. It seemed a perfect fit for Mary, who had dealt with so much and who still did not have a satisfactory treatment plan. I suggested Mary get a second opinion before she underwent a third rhizotomy."

"I said, 'Let's do it,'" Mary recalls. "It turns out, a second opinion was the missing piece of my healthcare puzzle."

Accolade forged a bridge for Mary. Grand Rounds collected the medical records and did the analysis. The opinion came back within a matter of days, and the news was stunning. Mary's pain was not related to a previously-diagnosed Tarlov cyst, nor was it related to degenerative changes in her lumbosacral spine. Mary's pain was related to her need for a total hip replacement.

"No physician had ever mentioned the possibility that my hip was to blame," Mary says. "I would have undergone an unnecessary procedure and likely not improved had Karen not suggested that I take advantage of Grand Rounds."

Having now had the hip replacement, Mary is in considerably less pain, though she is still haunted by some back trouble. Still, her life is so much better than it was. She can see her friends; she can go on dates with her husband. She has even traveled again —

taken a car trip to Canada with her family and made arrangements for her first-ever flight.

"She's just as important to me as a good doctor. I've come to rely on her for help with all of my healthcare issues."

"I sought relief for 11 years," says Mary. "I saw three specialists, two neurologists, and a spine specialist. My legs felt bruised, my muscles had tightened. I was walking with a limp." What she'd really needed, all that time, was someone who could listen well and

thoughtfully coordinate her care. Someone who also could ensure that all of Mary's ongoing and future treatments would remain in-network — eliminating the many out-of-pocket expenses and, in Mary's words, "financial mistakes" that had haunted the family.

"Karen played the biggest role in resolving my issues," Mary continues. "If not for her, I would be still struggling with pain."

Mary's trusting relationship with Karen played a major role in another, more recent, health crisis. When her yearly mammogram revealed a concerning spot, Mary didn't hesitate to call Karen.

"I wasn't afraid," Mary says. "I knew I'd get the best possible support as doctors developed my treatment plan." That plan has entailed a lumpectomy, along with adjunctive therapy of radiation and Tamoxifen.

But Mary's spirits are up. "It had been so foreign to me to reveal too much about myself, but I've become dependent on Karen," Mary says, looking back. "She is just as important to me as a good doctor. I feel like she's looking out for me. She knows me, knows my situation. She knows what I've been through — all those unnecessary treatments and very costly mistakes — so I've come to rely on her for help with all of my healthcare issues."

"I look back and see that the joy of life had escaped me. The joy is back."



"It took a while to build a relationship with Mary. She had been at this on her own for so many years — she really was at the end of her rope. But when I told her that Comcast offered a second opinion service as part of her healthcare benefits, everything changed for the better. It's amazing how many people are unaware of resources that are available to them. And in this instance, it made a huge difference!"

Karen
Accolade Health Assistant

” See other client stories at:
accolade.com/clientstories

▶ Watch Mary's video here:
accolade.com/marys-story



The Accolade Difference

We try to do as much for ourselves as we possibly can. We try to suppress our hurt, and our pain. But after dealing with chronic back pain since 1992, after enduring a number of procedures without any long-term relief, Mary began to trust her story to an Accolade team. Soon it became clear that Mary would be a prime candidate for a new Comcast NBCUniversal benefit — second opinion services offered via Grand Rounds. In Mary's case, awareness of this benefit made all the difference between unnecessary surgery and appropriate diagnosis and care.