

NURTURING OUR SELF-AWARENESS, TRANSFORMING PATIENT LIVES

By Steve Jurich and Jeannie Counce



Allison Massari, award-winning artist and accident survivor shares her perspective “from the other side of the stethoscope” with NHIA attendees. In a stirring keynote address, Massari reminded the audience that they have the power to transform patient lives.

The 2011 NHIA Annual Conference keynote speaker clearly understands health care intimately and is also familiar with infusion treatments, but is not a provider, payer or a regulator. **Allison Massari**, award winning painter and sculptor, is a patient—and has experienced firsthand the critical value of what personalized health care delivered by committed providers means, when facing the horrors of life-threatening conditions. Burned alive in a fire caused by a head-on auto collision 12 years ago, followed by a traumatic brain injury from a second high-speed car accident just two years later, Massari’s story is more than just one of survival. It’s a passionate story of finding the internal strength and commitment to allow hope to flourish—and to inspire the collaboration of teams of medical personnel to truly demonstrate the power of “authentic patient-provider relationships.”

Drawing on her personal experiences with empathic, devoted health care providers (including 40 days in a burn unit and years recovering), Massari shared her moving perspectives “from the other side of the stethoscope”—contending that kindness and compassion have a direct

impact on patient care, as she called upon each NHIA member to recognize and use the transformative power they have to help their patients heal, recover and thrive.

“When you connect with patients on a core human level, you restore their dignity,” she said in the April 5th Keynote General Session (supported by an educational grant from CHAP). “It goes beyond the technical part of your job. You are healing the places medicine can’t touch.”

Through her experience, Massari says she has come to know that humans need each other. “It’s up there with survival,” she says. “There was a point immediately following my accident where the agony of my loneliness was worse than the pain—I didn’t want to die alone.”

From the firefighters and emergency personnel who cared for her at the scene to the doctors and nurses in the burn unit who would talk to her and hold her hand to keep her calm during procedures that induced “relentless pain,” Massari says that caregiver support makes the difference. “You know that saying, ‘it takes a village’? Well, the village showed up for me.”

Massari, who also has first-hand experience with alternate-site infusion therapy, noted that, the cornerstone of home infusion is teaching and empowering the patient to be involved in his or her own care. “You are on their team, cheering them on, believing in their recovery.”

It’s an awesome responsibility to help someone heal, says Massari. “Even if they are not able to thank you at the time, you should understand that the things you do to connect to patients—a smile, a touch—have an impact. On their behalf, I thank you.”

Stirred by her emotional presentation and inspired by her call for NHIA members to harness their awareness that they are in the profound business of transforming lives for the better, the general session audience expressed their gratitude by giving Massari a warm and long-lingering standing ovation.

Upon leaving the stage, Lynn Giglione, NHIA (outgoing) Board Chair, embraced Massari and emotionally stated to her, “Thank you so much, Allison, for sharing your moving story with us and for your deep appreciation of the support offered to you by health care providers as part of your healing process.” Giglione continued, “Your amazing story is an inspiration to us all and serves to remind us of the significant and distinctive role our members can play in the lives of our patients! That self-awareness you have helped to nurture within us today is a treasure we will utilize well, as we return back home from Orlando!”

And, oh yes, there wasn’t a dry eye in the house!