Carolyn A. Taylor
Patient Engagement Council Obesity Cohort

Carolyn Taylor has spent a lifetime advocating for others, but it took her years and a single experience—the pursuit of bariatric surgery—to advocate for herself. Today, Carolyn supports and advocates for others in similar circumstances. "I knew I needed to make a decision regarding my health status, and more important, a decision regarding my life!" Carolyn says. "I felt I was living on borrowed time and that time was running out."

Before her surgery, Carolyn was a busy health care professional, wife, mother and grandmother. But she was also dealing with morbid obesity and multiple co-morbidities and chronic illnesses: diabetes mellitus, lack of mobility, respiratory deficits, chronic pain, severe eczema and stage 1-2 kidney disease. Her weight was influenced by pregnancy, the death of her first child after three days, yoyo dieting, family and work stress, poor eating habits, years of "shift work" and a love of food and cooking.

Carolyn had all the associated co-morbidities of her condition, which made her a high-risk patient for surgery. As a result, her request for bariatric surgery was denied. If it were not for the strong advocacy of her physician who successfully appealed the decision, Carolyn's outcomes might be very different.

Working in health care, Carolyn had been well aware of the risks associated with obesity, but her focus had been on taking care of everyone but herself. What has she learned? "You must be able to take help yourself first; in other words, 'put on your oxygen mask first,'" she says. Enlisting the help of a partner is essential, as is the acknowledgment that life will change dramatically.

A resident of Chantilly, Virginia, Carolyn has more than 37 years of experience in the health care industry as a clinician, manager and corporate executive with Taylor Oden Enterprises, an information technology and health care consulting firm. She is an adjunct faculty member in the College of Health & Human Services at George Mason University (GMU), where she teaches graduate students in nursing administration and research and undergraduates in health policy, leadership and management, and human resources in healthcare. She serves on the Dean’s Advisory Board for the college. Carolyn earned her bachelor’s and master’s degree in nursing and an MBA from the School of Management, all from GMU. She also earned her PhD in Nursing Administration from GMU in 2014.

Carolyn enjoys talking with others about the benefits of surgery and the positive outcomes she has experienced, and is comfortable approaching and engaging people in a respectful manner. She is a confident public speaker who has presented on health care, human resources, information technology, and financial management. Carolyn served as co-lead of the PORTAL Patient Engagement Council, served on the Portal Steering Committee, and on the Publications and Presentation subcommittee. She also serves on the Kaiser Mid-Atlantic Community Advisory Board (CAB). Carolyn is passionate about shared decision-making, pre- and post-operative support, minority engagement and participation in research, and the benefits of patient navigators.

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