Have you had a long day? Perhaps, you’re like Joe (a real physician, but Joe’s not his real name.) He’s a family medicine physician who is finally finishing up his long day of patient appointments. He didn’t even stop for lunch. Now he’s doing charts. It’s almost 9 p.m., he still isn’t finished and he knows tomorrow will be the same. Joe’s office manager just isn’t working out, but he’s too busy to train her or even meet with her. Joe knows he’s cranky with his staff. He’s cranky with his family, too. His kids have soccer games he’d love to attend. But most nights, he’s still working on charts in the office while they’re playing. He’s exhausted on the weekends and often doesn’t even make it to church. Joe’s marriage is strained, and his wife has been asking when things are going to change. All Joe can say is, “I’m trying.”

Or perhaps you’re like Sally (again, not a real name.) She’s a busy dermatologist. In fact, her practice has grown so rapidly in the last year she’s been praying about opening another office across town. But she wants to be cautious and not move too fast. Her new nurse is working out beautifully, but office management is beginning to be a challenge. Sally wonders how she will juggle her time between two venues if she adds another office. On the home front, her kids need help with their homework, laundry needs to be done if they’re going to have clothes to wear to school tomorrow and her husband ends up doing most of the cooking. There’s no question for Sally: balancing her professional life, home life and spiritual life is a major challenge.

What’s the answer to these two, true-life stories? How can healthcare professionals who are committed to their patients and their callings meet the incredible challenges of practicing healthcare in today’s world? How can they find balance in a culture that is so out-of-balance? It’s not easy, but Joe and Sally, plus a growing number of CMDA healthcare professionals, have found incredible help in coaching.

What is coaching?
Recently, healthcare professionals, hospital administrators, educators and coaches gathered at the annual Coaching in Leadership and Healthcare Conference, sponsored by Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital. Experts in coaching and healthcare delivered workshops on topics ranging from developing physician leaders to understanding the dynamics of change within an individual’s life. But why would top institutions like Harvard and McLean sponsor such an event? Because the practice of executive and personal coaching is one of the fastest growing trends in healthcare today.

For some people, the idea of “coaching” may be a new concept, especially in the field of healthcare. But what exactly is coaching? It’s a partnership that focuses on designing and developing specific, meaningful changes in the personal and/or professional life of the person being coached. In essence, coaching is a process that helps individuals get from where they are to where they would like to be. Since most coaching is done by telephone or Skype, the convenience for busy physicians and dentists is vastly appealing. Healthcare professionals are incredibly busy people, and the decision to work with a coach often stems from a desire to grow or see a change in life balance issues. But life balance is only one area where coaching can be benefi-
cial. More and more, today’s healthcare professionals find themselves in positions of corporate or staff leadership. Coaching can greatly assist those with office staffs or large numbers of people reporting to them in the corporate setting.

**How is coaching different?**

Unlike traditional therapy or counseling, coaches don’t focus on childhood or past experiences that might be at the root of why people live or act the way they do. Rather, coaches help healthcare professionals focus on the future, changes they wish to make, goals they would like to accomplish and the specific and measurable ways they will achieve those results.

Coaching is also very different from consulting, in that consultants are paid to diagnose needs and recommend solutions based on their own specialized expertise or knowledge in a particular field. Coaches, on the other hand, use powerful questions to promote discovery and generate solutions arrived at by the individual being coached.

When many people hear the word “coach,” they immediately think of a football or tennis coach. In those “coach” settings, the coach corrects a faulty swing or pattern of activity, setting goals for the athlete to strive to reach. But in a professional coaching relationship, the focus is on the values, strengths, knowledge and experience of the one being coached, with the coach acting as a catalyst to aid in the exploration and deployment of those intrinsic attributes. When Sally began coaching, her coach didn’t analyze her office dynamics and tell her what needed to change; rather, he asked her a question: “What one change might you make in your office that would produce a positive outcome for your staff?” Sally said she wasn’t sure, but she wanted to ask her staff that question. The result was a rotating “free day” for her staff at specific intervals. Her coach didn’t tell her what to do; instead, he asked her a question that produced exploration and discovery.

And the coaching process itself is a highly developed skill. Medical schools such as Harvard and others around the country see the value of coaching as a discipline and are offering courses focused on developing coaching skills. The International Coach Federation, the largest certifying organization in the world for professional coaches, has a demanding set of educational standards that must be met in order for coaches to be ICF certified. In addition to the educational requirements, coaches must submit to oral examinations and document hundreds of hours of professional coaching before certification qualifications can be met.

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– CMDA Member

**How can coaching help me?**

Christian coaches are skilled at assisting clients in a variety of personal and professional issues, building upon the foundational truths of Scripture, coupled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 20:5 says, “The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.” CMDA is committed to the idea that our coaches and the healthcare professionals we serve share a common worldview and a common goal of experiencing the fullness of life that results when Christians live according to the high calling God places on their lives.

For more than eight years, one of our field staff members has provided ICF certified Christian coaching to some of our members as a part of his efforts to minister to their personal and professional needs. We are excited to be greatly expanding our efforts, after seeing the great response from healthcare professionals who have received coaching and the increasing interest by those who want to learn the skill of coaching for their own lives and practices. This coaching program will be a tremendous benefit to our members, and it is focused on a three-pronged approach:

**Embrace**

Organizationally, we want to embrace a culture of coaching, realizing that the process of coaching can be beneficial to our leadership team, our field staff as they minister to healthcare students, our members, those involved in academics and even those on the mission field. CMDA’s National Director of Campus & Community Ministries J. Scott Ries, MD, said, “The benefits I’ve received from being personally coached are tremendous. I have benefited not only as a leader but as a husband and father.”

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periencing burnout on some level, there is a growing need in private practices and even in large healthcare systems for coaching. In fact, during Women in Medicine and Dentistry’s 2014 annual conference, more than 30 female healthcare professionals took advantage of coaching made available with physician coach Ann Tsen, MD. We recognize an incredible opportunity for our ministry to provide support and coaching within our expanding sphere of influence in healthcare.

**Equip**

We want to equip those interested in developing their skills in coaching others. Numerous healthcare professionals are discovering that they can employ coaching techniques in helping their patients make behavioral choices that promote health. Several of those who have already taken advantage of CMDA’s coaching program have indicated that they would like to be trained as coaches in order to be more effective as mentors for their colleagues. Some have actually already pursued training through other avenues and are now utilizing those coaching skills in their own practices and as they mentor others. We are committed to the development of an excellent, ICF-approved curriculum of training courses which will equip Christian healthcare professionals as coaches. We will utilize web-based courses in addition to offering courses at CMDA’s regional and national conferences. While other training courses are offered for healthcare professionals and others are offered specifically for Christian coaches, we hope to offer a unique “healthcare-specific” training in coaching from a Christian perspective.

**What’s next?**

Do you long for more clarity and joy in your life? Do you feel “stuck” and wonder how to move forward? Do you find yourself wrestling with challenges or conflicts in your life that don’t seem to be getting any better, or would you love to have a tool for mentoring your staff or the students or colleagues you work with?

Coaching might be just what you’re looking for! For more information about getting involved as this new initiative develops, please visit www.cmda.org/coaching or email coaching@cmda.org.

“My Christian professional coaching relationship has been a valuable place of knowledgeable and world-wise reflection on the issues and challenges in healthcare delivery. But more than this, I have appreciated it as a relationship built on a foundation of faith with a much higher goal than just helping me advance in this world’s systems, but rather helping me to pursue purpose and the strikingly different eternal goal of hearing our Savior one day say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

– CMDA Member

**About The Authors**

**STEVEN J. SARTORI, MD.** is a board certified family physician with more than 30 years of experience in primary care. He now uses this experience as a life coach, helping other physicians thrive in their personal and professional lives. Dr. Sartori received his BS in chemistry from the University of Wisconsin and his MD from The Medical College of Wisconsin. He completed his residency at the University of Illinois-Rockford. Dr. Sartori has served as a board member and treasurer of Christian Medical & Dental Associations, and he has participated in multiple short-term mission trips. He is married to Chris, and they have two daughters, Rebekah and Jessica.

**KEN JONES** has been a member of CMDA’s field staff since 2004, serving as area director for the San Francisco Bay Area and Redding. He has been a pastor for 46 years and is a certified Physician Life Development Coach. He currently coaches healthcare professionals across the United States and Europe. He has written four books and numerous articles on topics ranging from parenting and spiritual life to leadership development and marriage issues. He and his wife Randee have been married for 46 years, have three sons and six of the most amazing grandchildren on the planet. He loves to read, write and watch...St. Louis Cardinals baseball.