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NO EXCUSES

Health scare inspires doctor to help others take control of the aging process.

By Courtney McLaughlin



At 53, Dr. Michale (Mickey) Barber is in the best shape of her life. She works out a minimum of five days a week, adheres to a strict diet, and, at age 48, placed second in a Masters Figure competition. She is also a busy mom to two teenagers, a wife, and CEO of Cenegenics Carolinas in Charleston, SC.

Placed in Intensive Care

Looking at her today, it's hard to believe that just a little over 10 years ago, she

was in such poor health that she was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Barber says soon after she returned 40, she began experiencing nagging fatigue. Her health problems, caused by hypertension, high cholesterol, stress and possible chemical exposure, escalated quickly. Over the course of six months, she completely fell apart. Eventually, she was forced to take a break from her successful, established career as an anesthesiologist to recover. "It was a wake up call for me," she says of the ordeal. "I'm pretty hard headed.

Nothing like spending time in ICU to wake you up."

Fully "awake" and healthy, the anesthesiologist changed her life and career path. She became licensed in Cenegenics, the practice of age management medicine, and was a Cenegenics affiliate for two years before opening RenewYou, LLC. She started Cenegenics Carolinas three years ago.

Dr. Barber doesn't accept aging as an excuse for slowing down. She puts her mantra into practice at Cenegenics Carolinas where she and her staff work

with clients to create comprehensive health and lifestyle programs based on body type, gender, age and health risk factors. "It's not natural nor acceptable to feel tired and run down just because you are getting older," says Barber.

Outside The Box

Dr. Connie Taylor, a long-time friend and anesthesiologist at Ochsner Medical Center in New Orleans, describes Dr. Barber as bright, energetic and hard working. That last sentiment is especially true in regards to how she handled her illness. When her friend became ill, Dr. Barber fought hard to get well, staying open to the possibilities, says Dr. Taylor "Anything that seemed to have some value, she would try it," she said of Dr. Barber's recovery effort. "Anything in an effort to get a handle on it."

Her outside the box thinking and tenacity benefits her patients, says Dr. Taylor, who has experienced the comprehensive medical program first

hand. "She addresses what you can do to make yourself healthier. That's a lot of responsibility."

Dr. Barber's husband, Bob Graf, counts himself among her success stories. Married in December 2007, Graf and Dr. Barber met two years ago on a blind date. Prior to meeting his future wife, Bob was on the verge of developing type 2 diabetes, despite a regimented exercise schedule. He had a complete health evaluation and heeded her recommendations. At 62 he says he feels great and has reentered the competitive waterskiing arena. "There's any number of successes she talks about every day," says Bob.

She walks the walk and talks the talk. "She gets up at 6 a.m., works out for an hour to an hour and a half, and then goes to work. She is a very motivated person that has never accepted the status quo."

Looking Ahead

Dr. Barber admits her life today is no

less hectic than when she developed serious health problems. However, her outlook on health, aging and life has changed for the better. "I think my lifestyle now is less crazy and more relaxing," she says. "I take myself less seriously."

The sky is the limit as Dr. Barber looks forward to the next 50 years. Longevity is in the genes - her father lived until he was 93; her mother is 84. She has taken up golf, likes to travel and dance and wants to compete in another Masters Figure competition. Her true passion, however, is helping others. "My goal is to make sure no one has to be hit in the head like I was."

So what's the word from the good doctor? She advises young and old alike to take control of their health, get a good night's sleep, eat four to six servings of fruits and vegetables a day, stay hydrated, have hormones assessed, stay active and - most importantly - don't accept aging as an excuse for not feeling your best. ■