

# A Reservoir of Strength

---

*Spirit Award acceptance speech for Anne M.*

*May 22, 2014*

*5-6 minutes*

*(To host) Thank you!*

Good afternoon:

I want to talk about bravery. I want to talk about strength and courage -- determination and power -- all of the prevailing things that women living with MS embody every day. And I want to talk about appreciation.

To the friends and families -- the organizations like WAMS that support women with MS, **thank you**. Thank you for advocating on their behalf as they press on despite their illness. It's in that *spirit* of compassion that I am here today.

I can only imagine experiencing the symptoms of MS -- the vision problems, memory loss, the pain -- simply finding a doctor who can diagnose you properly; and not wanting to admit that you need help when you do -- the coming to terms with a new reality. I know that an MS diagnosis means new financial burdens, and for some, accessibility and mobility challenges. For one who hasn't had to live with these things, they are tough to imagine.

But it *isn't* hard to know that what our sisters need is empowerment, not pity. Every day, survivors of MS live through the impossible. They conquer the unthinkable. So it's not difficult to grasp the need for all of us to pull together and find a cure.

You know, when I was younger I used to be a competitive swimmer. I would swim anywhere—the pool, the beach, the lake. You name it. I loved to dive and whirl about in the freedom of the water. Some of my most vivid memories are of swimming at the beach. But one day, I remember trying to go against the tide and how hard it was. I paddled and pushed, and gave my last bit of energy to propel myself closer to the shore. I remember wanting so badly to stop and rest my feet on the ground, but being unable to because there was no ground. The water was too deep. I had to keep going<sup>1</sup>.

When I think about that experience it's easy to see how strong MS survivors are. It makes me think of a **quote** from Woodrow Wilson that goes something like, "*The man who is swimming against the stream knows the strength of it.*"

All of the survivors in this room know how hard it is to live with MS yet you triumph every day because you're tougher than this illness -- stronger than what most of us could ever know. You're resilient! I'm in awe of your tenacity because I know what was a 10-minute challenge for me is daily life for you -- swimming against the tides of life. For you, it might be more like going against the tide in the middle of a storm while carrying a sack of rocks on your back, but every day, you keep going. You push forward. You do not stop. You have a reservoir of strength.

That brings me to WAMS and the tremendous work it is doing to educate women about the work the *National MS Society* is doing.

In my role as President and Chief Operating Officer at AmeriHealth Caritas, I work to ensure nearly five million people have access to quality health care. A great number of these folks are right in our region, right in our back yard. More than 400 of our members in the Philadelphia area have primary and secondary diagnosis of MS and like the greater statistics; an overwhelming number of them are women.

All of the associates at AmeriHealth work to make sure the women with even the most modest resources can get the care they need. Whether it's assistance with medication, coordinating transportation to doctor's appointments or putting them in touch with community support groups, we are there to support them. We are there to help them keep going.

At AmeriHealth, we also care for children with MS—close to 300 across the country. These kids have the extra challenge of managing their illness on top of school. Unlike many adults, some may be navigating these rough waters at the apex of puberty—adding a layer to self-image issues and the forming of peer relationships. These kids are some of our most delicate members.

The work that WAMS is doing critical to advancing research toward a cure; it's the kind of forward-moving steps that these women and children need—that we all need. An MS-free world is a one that I'm sure we'd all like to see within the next decade. And it is my hope, my faith and my vision that we can accomplish this together.

It's a big task that will require lots of talent and resources -- thousands of hours of research but it is not beyond our strength. It is not too grand a dream for us to realize. Through partnership and understanding, we can write history. We can make a difference!

This is an exciting time in health care for our country. An explosion of change in policy is creating a place for many who were previously without access. At AmeriHealth Caritas it is our daily mission to help these people get care, stay well and build healthy communities. It is our job to be a part of team that finds a solution to their illness.

That's why I'm both humbled and honored to accept this award today. It's energizing. Thank you so much and I hope that everyone here continues to support WAMS. I hope all of you remember that collectively we have the passion, persistence and endurance to not only manage MS day to day, but to keep moving until we find a cure. Thank you! Have a wonderful afternoon!

---

<sup>i</sup> Story to be replaced with an original one by speaker.