

## on the record

Steven T. Plochocki's company is helping to change the way health providers keep medical records



### BY ILENE WOLFF

When Steven T. Plochocki was appointed CEO of Quality Systems Inc. in 2008, he had no idea that the presidential election the same year would lead to a huge windfall for the corporation.

The Irvine, Calif.-based company provides electronic health record, billing and other office management software systems for doctors, dentists and hospitals. It just so happened that the new President, Barack Obama, would incentivize doctors and hospitals to adopt the type of products QSI provides in his stimulus bill, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The 2009 ARRA gives \$27.4 billion for doctors and hospitals to help them implement electronic health records, according to Washington's latest estimate.

"We were in the right place at the right time," says Plochocki, FPCA '73, known for his ability to turn around troubled companies.

The corporation has set up 80,000 doctors and dentists and 250 hospitals in the United States with electronic health records, he says, with plans to expand into the international marketplace.

Electronic health records are expected to fuel healthcare reform by promoting evidence-based, widely accepted treatment plans, among other features. They're also supposed to reduce costs in part by cutting down on duplicate testing.

Electronic records also are designed to improve payments to doctors and hospitals from government programs and private insurers by automating the byzantine system of healthcare billing, says Dino Eliopoulos, a former colleague of Plochocki's who was CFO of urgent-care provider MedExpress for five years.

Electronic billing is the best way to meet the specific requirements of individual payers, he says.

"You want to be sure that when you provide services, you get paid for those services," Eliopoulos says.

The two men met in 2004 when Plochocki was recruited by Trinity Hospice to apply some of the



Steven T. Plochocki

same company turnaround magic he had doled out in previous rescues, including one at Upjohn Healthcare Services in Kalamazoo, the home healthcare division of the Upjohn Co. In two years, Plochocki transformed Trinity — the United States' eighth-largest hospice provider — from a money loser (\$5 million in 2004) to a money maker (\$7 million in 2006).

"He turned around a very dysfunctional operation," says Eliopoulos, who was CFO to Plochocki's CEO at Trinity. "He changed the corporate culture."

In addition to tightening up compliance, improving processes, shifting personnel and strategically moving Trinity from Tulsa, Okla., to Dallas, Plochocki also applied his personal touch to the business. For example, he changed the title of "salesperson" to "hospice consultant," a nod to the sensitive business of providing end-of-life care.

"He taught them that they were educators, not the typical sales team," Eliopoulos says.

As a result of pulling Trinity back into the black, Plochocki won awards from *Tulsa People* magazine and the *Dallas Business Journal*, as well as an American Business Award for "Best Business Turnaround." In addition, when Donald Trump learned of the Trinity turnaround, he wrote about Plochocki in his book, *Trump: The Way to the Top: The Best Business Advice I Ever Received*.

Plochocki — a self-described workaholic — recently received the 2011 International Business Award for IT Executive of the Year, and was named Outstanding Technology CEO in TechAmerica's 18th Annual Orange County High-Tech Innovation awards.

He sums up his more than 30 years in health care this way: "Most of my career was to buy and build and sell, or to buy and fix and sell."

Plochocki makes it sound simple, but given his humble beginnings, he's come a very long way.

Plochocki's dad was a Nazi concentration camp survivor who moved to the United States from Poland. After marrying, the elder Plochocki settled in a blue-collar neighborhood on Detroit's east side to raise a family that would grow to include Plochocki and his two sisters. The father, Ted, was a professional photographer for H.A. Powell Studios. The mom, Stella, worked in the dietetics department at Holy Cross Hospital. Ted Plochocki passed away in 1994, but Stella Plochocki, 85, lives in Warren.

The son's dream was to follow in the footsteps of columnists Joe

Falls and Pete Waldmeir in *The Detroit News* and become a sports journalist. But the reality was that sales jobs were more attainable than reporter positions in the 1970s. So, Plochocki signed on as a salesman for the Michigan Mutual Insurance Company after completing undergraduate studies. With the communication skills he learned while earning his Wayne State journalism and public relations degree, and his natural love for people, Plochocki was on his way to a successful career.

"My father always used to say you've got to go down a path that uses your natural wiring," he says.

Despite his modest background and subsequent success, Plochocki's not very materialistic, says daughter Tara, 32. While she thought about a suitable present for her dad for Christmas 2010, Tara recalled articles she had read about Berea College in Kentucky. Berea is a Christian liberal arts college that provides educational opportunities primarily for students from Appalachia who have great promise and limited economic resources.

"He has one foot in their world, but also one foot in the practical corporate world," says Tara Plochocki. "I thought maybe what would be cool is for him to talk to these students."

After making arrangements with the school's dean, father and daughter embarked on a two-day lecture junket in April 2011. Tara, an attorney in Washington, D.C., gave two speeches and her dad made several.

"The students absolutely adored him," Tara Plochocki says. "He had a very interesting thing to say in his lecture: that the biggest thing standing in your way is your own reticence to move forward. He says poverty sucks you back in; it has its own gravitational pull."

Plochocki, who worked his way through undergraduate and graduate school and was first in his family to attend college, elaborates: "I told them to be a bit selfish. Break away from your family, get an education, make your way in life.

"If you don't do that, you won't get through."

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***Ilene Wolff has written about healthcare issues for many publications.***