

Ten Questions With ...

Robert M. Dondelinger

What attracted you to healthcare technology as a career?

In 1971 I was in the Army and looking for something better and more marketable on the outside than being a Nike Hercules Fire Control crewman. I talked with the maintenance officer who mentioned this relatively little known field called “medical maintenance.” He told me that Nike Herc would be going away, but “people will always get sick.” My wife was an RN, so it seemed like a natural fit.

What does your job involve?

One colleague and I are responsible for all facets of medical logistics for the medical supplies and equipment used by 65 Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS) in the United States and Puerto Rico. The “senior” part comes from being in the field for more than 40 years.

What’s the best part of your job?

Bringing in new equipment and systems. For example, the physicians in our Medical Policy Directorate might tell me that they need an eye refractor. I perform a market survey, compare the results against their criteria, and provide my results with recommendations.

The worst?

Finding out that some piece of mission critical in a MEPS is malfunctioning and our normal supporting maintenance folks can’t repair it in a timely manner. This runs the risk of mission failure, and it requires out-of-the-box thinking, long days, and sometimes traveling to resolve. But the “atta-boys” I get from my chain of command kind of make up for it. Overall, I guess the worst part of the job isn’t so bad after all.

What’s been the proudest moment of your career?

That’s an easy one—having the Chief

Warrant Officer Five bar pinned on. CW5 is the capstone rank for warrant officers.

What’s been the most interesting development in healthcare technology?

Gotta be the MRI. Back when I first got into this field, you could troubleshoot almost any problem in an X-ray unit with no more test equipment than a 60-watt light bulb with two wires soldered to it. But the ability to look inside the body while blood is flowing, muscles are moving, the systems are functioning in real time, and actually SEE what’s going on is amazing.

What new development are you most excited about?

I read about a piezoelectric gadget about the size of a pack of cigarettes that’s capable of producing a decent amount of X-rays, with practically no heat, and it can be powered by a small battery.

What is one thing about you that others might be surprised to learn?

That one of my hobbies is counted cross stitch? Also, I’ve worked “tech” in community theater.

What is your philosophy in 10 words or less?

If you can’t have fun at work, it’s just work.

What’s your advice for a new employee?

Get in tight with the IT community. Learn their skills as well as conventional biomed skills. Learn programming languages, become skilled at working with networks and how devices work on them, understand the ins and outs of operating systems and programming in general, and become trained in the repair of personal computers as well as traditional medical devices. ■



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