

'An Evolution of a Winding Road'

How alumna Katy Votava used her education to veer off the beaten path of clinical work



As if she had foreseen her future, **Katy Votava '83N (MS), '97N (PhD)** purchased the URL for Goodcare.com 20 years ago, well before she had a plan for how to use it.

"I didn't know what I was going to do with it, but I bought it," said Votava. "I knew one principle — everybody wants good care. So I thought, well, let's see what I can do with this."

By 2003, Votava had found her justification. She founded Goodcare.com, a nationwide consulting firm offering guidance to individuals, helping them choose the best health care options available to them and how to plan for health care in retirement.

"When you're on your own as an individual, it's daunting enough in the workplace," she said. "Employers have already narrowed down health plan options, and it's hard for people to figure it out themselves.

They overspend because they don't pick the right plan."

Votava's path to starting her own business began with her enrollment at the University

of Rochester School of Nursing to earn her master's degree as a family nurse practitioner.

Votava then took a position at the Visiting Nurse Service, an organization dedicated to providing home health services to people of all ages, and later served as the director of clinical specialties and education for over 13 years. Votava then pursued a Pre-Doctoral Fellowship and PhD in health care economics and nursing, receiving a grant that supported her four-year fellowship. "I was working on a predictive cost model for home health services to link up clinical needs and outcome costs for at-home nursing care. It took a long time. I had moments where I wondered, 'Why am I doing this?'"

In 2001, she joined the UR School of Nursing as chief research officer (CRO). She oversaw research projects that fell in line with what she previously studied in her PhD program. "We did contract research in the telehealth space for employee health and wellness, and in-home care. We looked at the outcome of using at-home health monitoring and in-home care services for really sick individuals. We helped them manage their health better, so they could stay home," said Votava.

In addition to her research duties, Votava also consulted for the School of Nursing. She provided cost-benefit analysis and incorporated financial data into studies. After two years as CRO, Votava came to an intersection in her career. She realized consulting and cost-savings

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of health care had been a major focal point in her career thus far. Even when working full-time, individuals sought her guidance for their health coverage issues. Health care was becoming complex, and there were more hurdles to jump through.

She began her new venture by educating financial advisors about health care personal finance for their clients, but each case was as complex as the next. Financial advisors were experts in their fields, and Votava was an expert in personal health planning. People needed her help directly.

Over time, Votava's consulting services flourished. She offered webinars, gave presentations, and wrote a book titled *Making the Most of Medicare: A Guide for Baby Boomers*. The book, unofficially regarded as the cliff notes of Medicare, earned Amazon's No. 1 ranking in the Medicare category and is



Photographer: Kelly Kester

Katy Votava left her job as chief research officer at the UR School of Nursing to open Goodcare.com, a nationwide consulting firm. The move paid off in many ways for Votava, a frequent speaker and presenter whose book on making the most of Medicare is in its sixth edition.

now in its sixth edition. She has been featured on a number of television segments and websites, and speaks frequently on personal health care finance issues.

The continued growth of Goodcare.com has given Votava some firsthand insight into the ways clinicians can turn their experiences into unique careers, just as she did.

"There will always be an evolution of a winding road. I think it's a matter of following your passion," she said. "You'll find yourself doing different things than you ever thought you would do. Just go with it. You could have your projected plan, but then at the time, various things are different than you expected. As you progress in your career, keep your mind open."