Adults with autism find work helping AMA with quality assurance

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Aspiritech employs 120 people to conduct QA testing. The vast majority are adults with autism. One in every 54 children in the U.S. is diagnosed with autism, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

When those children become adults, they often have difficulty finding fulfilling employment opportunities. Young adults on the autism spectrum have the lowest rate of employment compared to their peers with other disability types, according to the National Autism Indicators Report—which includes statistics on high school students with autism, developmental disability services and outcomes in adulthood, vocational rehabilitation, and transition into young adulthood.

To help create career opportunities for adults with autism, the AMA has teamed up with the Chicago-based company Aspiritech on aspects of the AMA’s quality assurance (QA) testing.

“They do high-quality work,” said Dave Sosnow, vice president for product management at the AMA. “It’s very cost-effective, and it’s an opportunity for the AMA to support members of our community who have disabilities.

“It’s a win for all parties involved” Sosnow said.

Finding a niche

With 120 employees in two Chicago-area locations, Aspiritech is a 13-year-old company started by Brenda and Moshe Weitzberg, parents of an adult with autism who had trouble finding work to match their child’s abilities.

“It’s sort of an irony of the disability employment world that people are put into jobs for which they are not suited,” said Brad Cohen, the company’s chief marketing officer. “It could be bagging groceries or working in a restaurant—manual things that have lots of personal interaction.”

A nonprofit entity whose workforce is comprised almost exclusively of adults with autism, Aspiritech’s services largely focus on software and QA testing. The company has roughly 25 clients, including banks, pharmaceutical companies and the AMA, which has used about a dozen Aspiritech employees annually to test for glitches in the software platforms that utilize the AMA’s digital CPT code change application (the CPT SmartApp) and AMA Guides Digital.

Adults with autism tend to be well-suited for QA testing for a number of reasons. According to Cohen, that includes laser-like focus, attention to detail, superior ability to spot irregularities, and lack of boredom with highly repetitive tasks.
Kyle Dahl, the product owner for the AMA’s CPT coding app, has seen these skills on display firsthand. Aspiritech team members typically work at one of their two local offices that have been designed with the needs of their employees in mind, and are supervised by a project manager on the Aspiritech side.

There’s much interaction between AMA and Aspiritech employees, from training through the completion of the work.

“They understand the importance of the systems they are testing, and they understand the use cases, so they know how they are helping patients and doctors,” Dahl said. “They are really dedicated and detail-oriented. They help us out tremendously, and I can’t stress enough how grateful we are with all the work they have done for us.”

There is enthusiasm on the Aspiritech side of the process as well.

“We appreciate being included and trusted to test on such an important process,” said Jake Klein, a QA Lead at Aspiritech.

One of the AMA’s strategic approaches to advance health equity is to develop structures and processes to consistently center the experiences and ideas of physicians from groups that have historically been marginalized. That includes people with disabilities. Learn more about the AMA’s strategic plan to embed racial justice and advance health equity.

**Aligned missions**

Aspiritech aims to foster opportunities for adults with autism by paying competitive salaries and offering social programming. The company also offers clients value. The AMA aims to better the health of the nation. The two missions align, Sosnow said.

> “Employment is a key element of people’s mental health, so we are creating opportunities for gainful employment while we are also getting our important health care content into the echo system,” he said.

Only 32% of adults with autism, according to a 2021 report, have any sort of paid employment.

Considering that, the AMA-Aspiritech relationship is one that resonates personally for Sosnow, who has a teenage son on the autism spectrum.

“My son is a senior in high school and it is really hitting home that his path is unclear,” he said. “Seeing organizations that are looking to create opportunities—not just as charity, but as productive
employment that’s adapted to the needs of these individuals—is inspiring.”