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## Cindy Abbott to Kick Off 2011 CRN Family Conference

### "Reaching Beyond the Clouds: From Undiagnosed to Climbing Mt. Everest"

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On August 1, 2007, I was diagnosed with Wegener's Granulomatosis – a rare and potentially life-threatening disease affecting blood flow – and on May 23, 2010, I summited Mt. Everest. At the age of 51 and with functional blindness in one eye, I joined an elite group of American females who have climbed the world's tallest peak. My journey to Mt. Everest began three years ago, but my story, like the stories of so many others with rare, unknown diseases, started more than a decade earlier.

When I decided to climb Mt. Everest, I was already 48 years old and had no mountaineering experience. A few months later, I lost most of my vision in one eye and was diagnosed with Wegener's, but I refused to give up on my dream. After 2.5 years of training, medical setbacks, and personal sacrifice, I became one of the 157 non-Sherpa (people native to the Himalayas) to summit the South Side of Mt. Everest in 2010.

About 3000 individuals have summited Mt. Everest, and of those, only 250 are female. Approximately 400 Americans have reached the top of the peak; only about 1 in 10 have been women. In addition to feeling pride for being among this short list, I have the self-satisfaction of knowing that I accomplished this feat in spite of a significant medical challenge.

There are 30 million Americans with rare diseases, and on an international level there is no scale to measure the numbers affected. Before my climb I became an advocate to raise rare disease awareness for the National Organization of Rare Disorders (NORD) and the Vasculitis Foundation (VF). After 54 days of working my way up the mountain, I stood at the top of the world holding a NORD Banner.



Please go to my website for more information: www.reachingbeyondtheclouds.com



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