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Meet Cavell Alexander: Wearing multiple hats

An interview by Gerry Zack

Cavell Alexander, MBA, CPA, CIA, CFE, Vice President, Chief Audit Executive, and Chief Compliance Officer, UCHealth, Aurora, Colorado

SCCE & HCCA CEO Gerry Zack (gerry.zack@corporatecompliance.org) interviewed Cavell Alexander (cavell.alexander@uchealth.org) in January 2019.

GZ: Let's begin with your current position, which you've been in for a little over a year now. What are the biggest challenges in coming in from another organization to become Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) for a complex hospital system?

CA: The biggest challenge has been gaining an understanding of the context and factors considered for decisions made before I joined. While we maintain documentation for issues, often the actual discussion provides the context and is helpful in assessing if our decision and approach is still appropriate in the current environment. Fortunately, many of my team members have been here for a while and can often help me fill in the blanks.

GZ: Tell us a little bit about UCHealth as an organization, as well as how it's structured in relation to the compliance function.

CA: UCHealth is a 10-hospital system, primarily in Colorado, that employs more than 20,000 people. The system is a relatively "young" organization that formed when University of Colorado Hospital, an academic medical center, and Poudre Valley Hospital (a large regional hospital) came together as UCHealth in 2012. Then Memorial Hospital, a hospital formerly run by the City of Colorado Springs, joined. We recently acquired two smaller rural hospitals and activated a new hospital. We are building two more hospitals that we will activate in the next six months, and we have a medical group with over 900 employed physicians. So overall, there is a lot of variety in operating models and regulatory requirements, which keeps it interesting.

As to my team, there is me and my executive assistant extraordinaire, the audit function includes 14 people, and the compliance function has 17 people, including our chief privacy officer and her five direct reports. Like many of my peers, we need more resources, especially given the growth of our system. As a result, we are trying a couple of things in compliance to enhance our efficiency. We are designating subject-matter experts in many areas so that not everyone on the team needs to be an expert in and do all things, and we are implementing an [artificial intelligence] AI-enabled monitoring tool for our Epic EHR [electronic health record] that will cut down on our manual monitoring and support privacy investigations.