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Meet Beth DeLair: A journey through compliance

by Beth DeLair, JD, RN, CHC, and Adam Turteltaub

AT: You have had a very interesting career, covering various elements of healthcare and even various aspects of the compliance field. I'm very eager to explore what you have done. You started your professional career as a nurse. What drew you to that field?

BD: My mother was a medical social worker, so I was exposed to healthcare at an early age and had an interest in a career where I could help people.

AT: I'm curious: if you can remember, what were your perceptions of compliance back then?

BD: I was a nurse in the early to mid-1990s before healthcare compliance was really a career option. At that time, my view of "compliance" was synonymous with The Joint Commission.

AT: After working for several years as a nurse, you made an interesting turn and went to law school. That's not the most typical path. What led you to it?

BD: I knew I wanted to go to graduate school and considered many career options, including becoming a nurse practitioner or nurse anesthetist, a pharmacist, and even a physician before settling on becoming a lawyer. I felt going to law school would round out my skill sets more, challenge me in a way I hadn't been before, and that the combination of a nursing and a legal background would open many doors and provide numerous potential opportunities.

AT: From there, you returned to healthcare and went straight into compliance. Why compliance instead of working in a more traditional legal role?

BD: I initially went to law school with the intention of defending physicians, nurses, and other clinicians from medical malpractice claims. I even worked a year as a nurse paralegal for a law firm in my second year of law school. However, I quickly learned that I did not have the personality, desire, or skills to be an effective litigator. I was fortunate to do an internship in the general counsel's office at a hospital in the city where I went to law school and was immediately exposed to healthcare compliance in the form of reviewing contracts for compliance with the Stark Law. This led to a second internship, where I split my time between the general counsel's office and the compliance department, which then led to an offer of full-time employment in the compliance department. I am grateful to have had those opportunities as I learned a lot, and it paved the way for me to become involved in healthcare compliance in a state where it was just developing as a field.

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