

Compliance Today – October 2021 Meet Emmelyn Kim: Never stop learning

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This interview with Emmelyn Kim was conducted in late spring 2021 by **Adam Turteltaub**, Chief Engagement & Strategy Officer, SCCE & HCCA.

AT: A lot of people end up in compliance or an industry. Life sort of just takes them there. As I was preparing for this interview and learning about you, it struck me that you seemed destined to be here. Healthcare has been the focus of your entire career, starting with college, where you studied psychology and biology. What attracted you to the healthcare field?

EK: I was attracted to healthcare primarily because my father was a physician. He immigrated to the US from the Philippines in the late '60s after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was signed into law, largely due to the Civil Rights Movement. This opened up the borders during a time when there was a shortage of healthcare providers, and so my father completed his residency and worked in the city of Chicago, Illinois. As a kid I perused all of his medical books and observed how he provided care to our community. After I graduated college, I worked as a research coordinator at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in the Department of Preventive Medicine, Division of Epidemiology, on large federally funded multi-ethnic research studies. This allowed me to gain extensive research experience. I learned from the ground up and did everything from overseeing recruitment efforts involving diverse populations, obtaining informed consent from participants, phlebotomy, processing samples in the lab, coordinating research participant visits, writing progress reports, data management to implementing quality control measures, and more. After this experience I knew that I wanted to continue working in research, which is critical to advancing science and medicine to improve public health.

AT: I should point out that your passion for the field was mirrored in a passion for continuing your education. You earned a master of arts in psychology; a master of public health, health promotion; and master of jurisprudence. Most people have a hard time keeping up with their continuing education units. How were you able to balance such a laudable amount of ongoing learning?

EK: I consider myself to be a lifelong learner and am always curious about how everything ties together in the healthcare and research arenas since they are so multifaceted. It's interesting because over time all of my education has become complementary to each other and something that I draw from on a daily basis. When you study psychology, you learn a lot about individual behavior, but public health helps you think about health from a broader perspective that involves policy and global health. I always wanted to go to law school, but life happened, and I was blessed with beautiful children after I finished my public health degree. When my children were old enough, I decided to enroll in a health law program. Although it was very challenging to study while working full time and being a mother, it was fulfilling because it helped me better understand the legal framework in healthcare. I was also able to use what I learned in my work. For example, I took a course and completed my law school thesis on the European Union privacy and data protection law in relationship to international data transfers. This was instrumental in helping me understand and establish a framework for research requiring compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

AT: What do you think this classroom training brings to your work that you couldn't find from day-to-day, on-the-job learning? I'm particularly curious about any lessons of psychology that should be applied since compliance is all about channeling human behavior.

EK: I learned quite a lot about human behavior from studying various schools of thought in psychology, learning research methods, and reading published research. What I walked away with was the notion that human behavior is complex, and you cannot effect change only on the individual level—there are other factors on the macro level that you have to pay attention to as well. A lot of what we do in compliance relates to changing behaviors, and in essence, changing culture. Paying attention to human behavior and being able to read people is important and can help you establish better relationships with key stakeholders, be more adept with investigations and conflict management, and help you communicate more effectively. However, that's only part of it; you have to understand and come to terms with yourself, including strengths and areas of opportunity for further development. Having humility and a constant learning and growth mindset will set you apart. Compliance professionals are also challenged by external factors, such as the environment and social and political movements happening on a local and global scale, so understanding timing and windows of opportunity in our work is also important.

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