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CCOs Continue Usual Compliance Work and Tackle COVID-19 Waivers; 'It Has Consumed Me'

By Nina Youngstrom

In a snapshot of how COVID-19 has affected compliance programs, calls to the hotline now include reports about lack of personal protective equipment and employees who came to work even though they seem to have symptoms of the novel coronavirus. With the possible infection, the compliance officer refers the call to the head of the employee's department for immediate investigation.

As they navigate the uncharted waters of the novel coronavirus, compliance professionals are combining COVID-19-related work—helping interpret CMS's blanket waivers^[1] of regulatory requirements in tandem with state laws—and pre-COVID-19 compliance activities, including audits, investigations and education. Some compliance projects have been modified, partly because CMS has temporarily suspended Medicare fee-for-service audits and also to give breathing room to operational leaders as they plan for the surge of COVID-19 cases or are in the thick of it now. Sometimes, compliance professionals are stepping outside familiar territory.

"I am helping with the COVID-19 waivers. It has consumed me," said Kristy Berrier, senior director of compliance for facilities at Novant Health, which owns hospitals, clinics and other entities in North and South Carolina and Virginia. At the same time, "we are still carrying the usual audit and investigations workload." The nature of some compliance has changed, however. For example, compliance program managers who are used to walking the halls, spreading the word about the compliance program, obviously "are kind of handcuffed" for the time being, Berrier said. "Their focus is supporting education efforts."

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