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Meet Lea Fourkiller: Working to evolve a compliance program that lives within operations

by Lea Fourkiller and Debbie Troklus

DT: What is your background?

LF: I spent the first years of my career in the oil industry, in the areas of marketing, tax, and law. It was a great experience to work in a highly regulated industry and learn about risks and operations in all aspects of marketing and refining. At the time, I did not realize that this was just preparing me for a second career in compliance. I have been fortunate to have been in the compliance realm both inside and outside of healthcare. I joke that my attorney friends say I have gone to the dark side, and my compliance friends say I have found the light.

DT: Why did you decide to go into compliance?

LF: I didn't decide to go into the field of compliance; it really found me. I had started working with the Nashville Area Indian Health Service at the Cherokee Indian Hospital in the contracting department, and within days, I was given the opportunity to take on compliance responsibilities. I laugh about this when I teach at the academies and ask how many of the class also found their careers by "anointment" or were voluntold. I had no idea at the time, but this was the best opportunity that I ever could have had. When you have a career that is centered around the life of a patient, what could be more purposeful?

DT: Do you hold Society of Corporate Compliance and Ethics (SCCE) and Health Care Compliance Association (HCCA) certifications? If so, why do you feel they are important?

LF: Yes, I do hold certifications in both SCCE and HCCA, and they have both been important throughout my career. The oil industry prepared me for SCCE certification and gave me great insight into how compliance can live within operations. When I was introduced to the field of healthcare compliance, I had no knowledge of the regulatory authorities over compliance and what was expected of the compliance officer role and the compliance program. I attended the HCCA Compliance Academy 20 years ago, which was foundational in setting me on the path for this career. The academies provided me with insight and knowledge in this very complex and ever-changing field and taught me what I needed to achieve and learn to be qualified for certification . . . and I have to mention the networking opportunities I found from day one and the many lifelong friendships I have developed over the years with my compliance colleagues. The certifications are recognized as important in the industry and my career; it has been both a requirement of former jobs I held, and it is one that we also require of INTEGRIS Health compliance roles.

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