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Meet Andra M. Popa: Approaching compliance with a focus on design

Andra M. Popa, CHC, Consultant at Ankura Consulting Group, Chicago, IL, and Florida

This interview with **Andra M. Popa** was conducted by **Roy Snell**, co-founder and former CEO and Strategic Advisor at SCCE & HCCA, a few days prior to his retirement in March and as COVID-19 descended upon us.

RS: Please tell us a little about your background.

AP: I have worked in clinical research billing and compliance for academic medical centers, research universities, and community hospitals throughout the US for about 12 years. People may be hearing more about clinical research trials due to the COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials. Ideally, even these clinical trials should have negotiated budgets, clinical trial agreements, and Medicare coverage analyses before they begin. In my work, I create Medicare coverage analyses, which are used in several stages of the revenue cycle process, such as in negotiating the budget and clinical trial agreement, as well as in providing the information for how all items and services within a clinical research trial are billed in terms of Medicare by a healthcare entity. This information is incorporated into the billing and coding system of a healthcare entity. I also work to ensure that clinical trials comply with human subject protection regulations. Further, I really enjoy conducting billing and coding audits and creating and presenting related education.

I went to college in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, at Boston College and attended law school and a master of laws (LLM) program in healthcare law at Loyola University Chicago School of Law. Soon after completing my LLM, I joined a newly founded consulting firm formed by my LLM program Medicare law professor, which eventually became part of the risk, forensics, and compliance vertical in Ankura Consulting Group.

RS: Tell us how you discovered the compliance profession. You are very involved in the Health Care Compliance Association; tell us how you discovered HCCA. How did this whole journey begin for you?

AP: While a health law LLM student, I was fortunate to have been given a free ticket to attend a regional HCCA conference. I recall listening to Marjorie Doyle speak on organizing compliance areas according to risk and magnitude, and it was life changing. A few years later, when I was asked to create the first compliance program within a research office at a large Midwestern university, one of the first things I did was create a list of the program risk areas according to this method. That HCCA session on risk areas was even more prescient than I realized, as compliance has evolved to be in part enterprise risk management that includes emergency preparedness to respond to possibilities such as emerging infectious diseases, biohazardous threat agents, cyberattacks, infrastructure failures, political instability, or natural disasters. You told me in one of our many interviews that you were one of the first people with the word "compliance" in their title and that the first time you were introduced to another person who also had a compliance title, you had an experience similar to the one I had at my first conference and wanted to gather a broader community. From two members in 1996, there are now over 12,000 members in just HCCA. Thank you for your incredible insight to create associations in the then-new professional fields of compliance and ethics with a very practical focus, as well as for your leadership of HCCA and mentorship. HCCA allowed me to start with a strong foundation of very practical compliance knowledge taught through the conferences, webinars, and books. HCCA also created a community.

RS: You participated in the HCCA silent auctions a few times...