

Compliance Today – October 2020 Meet Jordan Muhlestein: Keeping a hand on compliance's pulse

Jordan Muhlestein, Compliance & Ethics Director, Corporate Compliance Office, Intermountain Healthcare, Salt Lake City, UT

This interview with Jordan Muhlestein (jordan.muhlestein@imail.org) was conducted in late summer by Adam Turteltaub (adam.turteltaub@corporatecompliance.org), CHC, CCEP, Chief Engagement & Strategy Officer, Society of Corporate Compliance and Ethics & Health Care Compliance Association.

AT: Your first experience working in healthcare wasn't in compliance or even a related field, like law or internal audit, but as an electrocardiogram (EKG) technician. Do you remember what your experience with compliance was back then, if any?

JM: I started as an EKG tech in June 2003, just a couple months after the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act Privacy Rule became effective. The don't-you-dare-share-patient-information training was my first experience with compliance. It was couched as another way I could provide excellent care to patients, and that has really been my focus as a compliance professional—being compliant helps us care for people. Working with patients directly was incredibly energizing.

AT: How has that time as a frontline provider of care helped shape your approach to compliance?

JM: A few things stand out from my time as an EKG tech. I worked graveyard shifts twice a week for most of my time, and I gained an appreciation for the physical and mental toll that can be imposed on healthcare workers. That helps me be understanding when I receive a middle-of-the-night hotline call or when trying to plan meetings around providers' clinical schedules.

Another item is the state of constant readiness required when I was on call to run to the emergency department or a code blue at a moment's notice. I honestly enjoy the aspect of compliance where I never know what will come up next; it makes sure I never stop learning and finding ways to improve.

Lastly, as an EKG tech, I was a piece of a large healthcare team that came together to respond to each patient situation. I see the same strength in compliance, where professionals from many areas of expertise come together to address each situation. Each person's strengths support the rest of the group. I like to think that as long as I provide support to others when they need it, I don't need to feel bad when I need to lean on them. Healthcare is all about teamwork, whether you're in a clinical role or not.

AT: I think it's good to point out that you haven't only worked in healthcare. Both in college and then afterwards you were a journalist. It's not a profession that's often discussed—or ever discussed—as a good background for compliance, but I imagine it was better preparation than people would think. It must have been a very good place to learn interview and communication skills, yes?

JM: Absolutely. Journalism, especially print journalism, requires you to synthesize information quickly, prioritize it, and then share the important details with a specific audience in an easily digestible way. Those skills are helpful in many aspects of life, but I think they translate to compliance well because so much of our work hinges on small nuances in law or policy. Those nuances can be complex and confusing, so being able to distill them to

their simplest form really helps decision-makers in your organization.

Journalism also put me in uncomfortable situations where I was expected to still do my job in a professional and compassionate way. I am confident my journalist experiences—such as interviewing a woman as her home was literally burning down behind her or going door-to-door to interview residents of a neighborhood that just experienced a drive-by gang shooting—helped prepare me for dealing with the difficult investigations and conversations in compliance. Another thing journalism taught me is the importance of a good editor. That helped me learn to appreciate correction and welcome constructive criticism.

AT: So, what led you to healthcare from journalism?

JM: In high school, I had the goal of being a physician, as I was drawn to the mission-driven focus of healthcare and the personal fulfillment that brings. However, as college progressed, I realized I was *not* drawn to all the rigorous science classes required for premed. I enjoyed talking to people and writing much more than the idea of studying organic chemistry. That is what led me to journalism.

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