

Been There, Done That! Health Care Law Fellowship: How to Do More with Less Through a Health Care Law Firm Sponsored Legal Fellow

You know the drill. 3L's are wooed by private firms and eventually settle into new associate positions following law school graduation. And it begins. Large salaries but long hours. Sacrificing to make a mark and spending evenings, weekends, and holidays to meet new associate benchmarks and earn that fast track to partner or shareholder. For some, the path to partnership is the ultimate career goal and for others they decide to leave firm life and transition to in-house counsel. To be sure, some of the best and the brightest minds follow the traditional route. But what if there is an alternative path to jumpstart a career in health care law that benefited health care institutions while growing the skills of new attorneys?

This was the puzzle I sought to solve—how do we attract new attorneys to health care law and is there value for the lawyer, firm, and in-house counsel by imbedding a new attorney in-house for a couple of years? After discussions with University of Kansas Chancellor Doug Girod and in collaboration with The University of

Kansas Health System General Counsel Dan Peters, a new health care law fellowship idea began to take shape. When the idea was pitched to Jay Howard, Shareholder at the nationally recognized firm Polsinelli, his firm quickly recognized value in fostering and promoting emerging new attorneys specializing in health care law. The fellowship formally kicked off in June 2021, with the selection of Haley Essner as the inaugural health care law fellow.

The program is selective, welcoming applicants across a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds, and the initial pool was highly competitive. A successful candidate gains access to a truly one-of-a-kind two-year program experience—fresh out of law school—to engage in on-the-job training as a practicing attorney in the combined setting of the University's Office of the General Counsel and Health System General Counsel's office. The fellow is supported right out of the gate, throughout bar prep and the licensure process and continuing education support. After admission, the fellow moves into a place of peer support among a team of general counsel attorneys

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Haley Essner earned her BS in Finance with a minor in Business Law from Southeast Missouri State University and her JD with a Health Law concentration from Saint Louis University School of Law. Haley previously completed an externship program with Ascension and worked with nonprofit Missouri Appleseed on health law issues related to the criminal justice system.

and alongside administrative leaders of both organizations. The fellow is immersed in day-to-day operations of an Association of American Universities (AAU) R1¹ designated research university and academic medical center as a member of the legal team. The experience offers invaluable and extraordinary insight and access into operations, allows the fellow opportunities to conduct important health care-related legal research, and provides direct legal advice and recommendations to the university's and health system's internal clients. The fellowship is not comparable to the typical internship, clerkship, or externship, as the fellow is directly engaged as a fully licensed attorney. The position offers professional development, networking opportunities, and inclusion in new associate events hosted by Polsinelli, along with participation in the Polsinelli health care law practice group.

Also, unlike an internship, the program goes well beyond day-to-day assignments and provides planned immersive experiences across a diverse range of units within the allied health professions and the only National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center in the region. The immersion experiences include Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and privacy; legislation and regulatory compliance; risk management and medical liability; transactional; public health; bioethics and a wide range of issues relating to research, clinical practice, and human trials; and medical education. The experiences are particularly unique given the exposure to academic medical center legal issues.

At a time when institutions are facing pandemic and legislative-driven funding cuts, the University of Kansas Medical Center and the University of Kansas Health System have opened the door to emerging new talent, and Polsinelli is positioned to take a long and meaningful look at a licensed and well-trained potential new firm associate. On successful completion of the two-year fellowship program, the health care law fellow is positioned with career avenues and may choose to remain in-house, may be extended an opportunity to join Polsinelli or other law firm opportunities, or may decide to take the fellowship experience to another arena of health care law. A win-win for everyone.

Brought to life this past year through the University of Kansas Office of the General Counsel, the University of Kansas Health System, and Polsinelli, the new Polsinelli Health Care Law Fellowship program is already gaining interest from across the country. As a model, it is a mutually beneficial avenue for health care institutions, prominent health care law firms, and new health care attorneys. It also has the potential to define and illuminate the career path of a bright new health care law attorney.

¹ R1 is a designation by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education granted to universities that award at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees and have at least \$5 million in total research expenditures.

AHLA thanks the leaders of the In-House Counsel Practice Group for contributing this member forum article: Aletheia Lawry, HonorHealth (Chair); Shawn Gilman, Providence St Joseph Health (Vice Chair—Education); Michael Gorfinkle, CVS Health (Vice Chair—Education); Sarah Swank, Nixon Peabody LLP (Vice Chair—Education); Elizabeth Trende, Squire Patton Boggs (Vice Chair—Education); and Brian White, The University of Kansas Office of the General Counsel (Vice Chair—Member Engagement).