



Thanks to the extraordinary commitment and expertise of AHLA leaders, the American Health Lawyers Association continues to thrive and serve as the essential health law resource in the nation. The Association's strong foundation reflects a history that is vibrant, meaningful and worth sharing. Finding a way to preserve AHLA's history was especially relevant in light of the Association's 50th Anniversary, which was celebrated throughout 2017.

This transcript reflects a conversation between AHLA leaders that was conducted via audio interview as part of the Association's History Project. More than 60 of AHLA's Fellows and Past Presidents were interviewed. A video documentary was also prepared and debuted on June 26 during AHLA's 2017 Annual Meeting in San Francisco, CA.

March 3, 2017

Elise Brennan interviewing Lois Cornell:

Elise: My name is Elise Brennan and I'm an AHLA fellow. I am very excited to interview Lois Cornell because she has an extremely interesting background, including the fact that she has served as President of the American Health Lawyers Association rather recently. So, with that going on, Lois, why don't you introduce yourself, tell us what you do and may be give us a little description of your professional background in some of these really interesting transitions you've made.

Lois: Okay, thanks so much and I really appreciate this opportunity to participate in this project and in this conversation, Elise.

I am currently serving as past President of AHLA, so I'm still on the Board and active and it has been an incredibly great experience to really be able to be engaged with health lawyers now and through all the years as I've been progressing through my career.

My professional background is right now, I'm serving as the Executive Vice President, which is the Executive Leader of the Massachusetts Medical Society. It is, at this point in my career right now, a non-lawyer position that I actually took about nine months but what led me to this job and to this current role is really a legal career that started out of law school practicing at a law firm in Boston. I practiced in law firm, Goodwin Proctor. I was trained as a corporate lawyer and a healthcare lawyer, and right out the gate when I started practicing in that environment I joined, what was then, NHLA. It was the place that everyone recognized was the resource for health law issues and the place where I received all of my good information and preliminary training on a variety of different issues.

I worked at Goodwin Proctor for about ... which is now called Goodwin, for about six years and then after the birth of my second child, I went in-house and I took a job at the managed care organization Tufts Health Plan. I worked my way through Tufts ... for 24 years I worked there, rising to the level of being the General Counsel and the Chief Administrative Officer and throughout that time there, AHLA became a really big part of my professional career and of my professional growth, so I had an opportunity to get involved in AHLA. Proactively on my part, I will say was my desire to get out of my small community in Massachusetts, where I was practicing in the suburbs in a managed care organization and start getting involved with larger issues at a bigger level and I decided I would try speaking, and it was something I was, frankly, a little concerned and afraid about doing because I wasn't comfortable in front of large groups but

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through AHLA, I submitted a few proposals and I had an opportunity to be paired up with a very experienced speaker, Michael Peregrine, and jumped into talking about non-profit governance issues, and soon found myself getting involved in health lawyers in a really positive way that really helped me move forward.

So, I had that opportunity and it was partly initiated on my own, but it was also really something that AHLA makes available to so many. Then my career then moved ... I left working in managed care and left Tufts Health Plan a year ago December. I started looking around for a variety of different roles and landed this job working at the Massachusetts Medical Society as it's Executive Leader, and am thoroughly enjoying that and finding that my relationships at AHLA and the work that I've done is incredibly relevant in my new job.

Elise: Lois, one thing you told me, I think is so interesting, is you're now the Executive VP of a membership organization, which is what AHLA is, a membership organization. Can you tell us how your involvement as a volunteer in AHLA has now helped you in your paid position in another membership organization?

Lois: Yes Elise, it's so interesting 'cause frankly the work that I did at health lawyers and the opportunities that I had to serve both in conferences and speaking in a variety of different conferences, so that's working in education and of attorneys on healthcare issues, to the positions that are held on a variety of different committees, particularly at the Board level, and I served on the membership committee and nominating committee and finance committee, et cetera ... all gave me a very good deep understanding of how membership organizations are run.

When I was out looking for a position and really trying to decide where my next path was going to take me after I left Tufts Health Plan, I was interested in, but not quite sure it was going to be the right mix for me to be Executive Leader at a Medical Society, which is a membership organization, a physician in healthcare leaders, and it is an organization that educates physicians for their continuing medical education requirements in addition to being an advocacy organization for physician issues, and also publishes in New England Journal of Medicine.

But the thing that was so interesting to me about this overlap was that my work that I did serving on committees and working in executive leadership in AHLA, particularly as we had a new leader come in with David Cade, and I worked very closely with him as he assumed his new role, and I was the President during his year and when we changed through that was it was incredibly relevant and has been very, very helpful in my new role as the leader at the Medical Society, because the work that we do.

The membership organization in the Massachusetts Medical Society is all geared to meeting the needs of our physician members, anticipating how they want to receive information, trying to pivot and navigate as the world is becoming more electronic, understanding the value of one-on-one social interactions, understanding how important it is to have information out in a very effective and relevant way, and timely way, and frankly, how to draw in more members ... various different tools and processes and ways that you can get your name in front of physicians in Massachusetts, with the Medical Society's side and from AHLA it was for health lawyers throughout the country to draw in and attract a diverse group of practitioners to be interested in and become members of your organization.

The parallels are very significant but frankly, it gave me a skillset that I never really anticipated would be something that would be the mainstay of my next path in my career.

Elise: When we were talking a little bit in preparation for this interview, you also told me about how you proactively sought out serving on a health system Board, hospital board, and I think that's really good advice for younger lawyers on how you might ... when you were in the health plan world but you wanted different experiences, how you might find ways to broaden your experiences and expertise for maybe future opportunities. So would you discuss that a little bit and what that meant to you?

Lois: Sure. That is something that as I look back I'm really pleased that I did take the initiative to do so. As I realized I was working in health law and learning quite a bit within a managed care organization, there were gaps in my knowledge base and one of them was on the provider side. With the good fortune of having my boss, Jim Roosevelt, who was an AHLA past President as well, together with the chairman of our Board support, I sought out a position on a hospital Board because I really felt that that would give me a great opportunity to see issues from a different perspective and with the help of the health plan, frankly, also have that deeper knowledge and broader vision of one of it's Executive Leaders, and I have to tell you that that experience was particularly useful

I'm actually sitting in an office over at [inaudible 00:12:30] Royal Medical Center right now 'cause I was over having a conversation with the Chancellor of the medical school. I have relationships here now that are really, really helpful in my new career.

But I'll say that the opportunity to learn the challenges that providers were facing, both health systems and physicians, was extremely useful and relevant and I would urge anyone who is looking at their career and as young lawyers are approaching their path going forward, to always be looking up and thinking and be curious, but to forge your own path and look ahead and determine where your gaps are.

Frankly, the other gap of mine, Elise, was speaking and I was not comfortable speaking publicly and realized if I was really going to move forward in a more senior role in my career, I would need to get better about that and frankly, overcome that and develop a skillset, I should say. AHLA provided me with that opportunity and I sought out speaking opportunities locally with our Bar Association and then with American Health Lawyers that again was helping me forge my path.

So that broadening of your career and looking for extra things you can do outside to serve on Boards to get involved with policy leaders, to serve in another portion of an industry that's relevant, together with taking advantage of what AHLA has to offer, to augment and supplement your skills for your career path is really helpful, and frankly, it's fun. It's interesting. It keeps you busy. It's a lot of fun.

Elise: I think the real interesting perspective you bring to this is 'cause everybody talks in terms of involvement in trade associations or AHLA or other things in terms of a way or marketing and networking, but the perspective that you bring, that I think is so interesting, is that that involvement has an entirely different benefit in that people frequently don't think about, which is improving your own skills and filling in areas where you may not have the opportunity in your practice to work in.

I mentioned to you, I remember from Board experience on the AHLA ... I'm now serving in the ballet Board as the Chair, and that experience on AHLA has helped me in another non-profit organization in the arts.

So that's a very good perspective for young lawyers is how you can build your skills through AHLA participation or other types of non-profit participation on a volunteer basis, and I love that perspective.

Lois: It is very relevant, and I just want to add that I think that as young people are looking at their career paths going forward there's a lot that's thrown at them to really succeed and do well at their work that's within the environment that they're in and that's always good to get yourself into a place where you excel and you do very well with what the clients and with a particular law firm with the work that's there. But if you have a future idea of where you want to go or you want to give yourself opportunities, you have to look beyond that to forge your own path, and that AHLA has so many different avenues and opportunities for that, together with serving on Boards in your community that can really give you those tools.

Elise: Another, I think, very unique thing in your involvement with AHLA, which I would love to hear you talk about, which has to do with the volunteer community service project that I believe you started for the Board, or were involved in, and then continued for instance when you went down to New Orleans after Katrina and helped with some community service.

So can you talk a little bit about what the Board is doing, because I suspect a lot of members don't know about some of the community service projects that the Board has involved themselves in recently.

Lois: I'd be happy to. I cannot take credit for starting it though because there were people before me that also got the Board involved in the community and for our mid-year meeting, both mid-year meetings, and frankly, actually, some of the conferences. The leadership at the conferences had chosen to start a half a day early to invite people from the Board and in conferences, anyone who's attending the conference, to arrive earlier to actually participate in the community service project in the community, to really try to make a difference in that community.

I had the opportunity, when I was the coming President of AHLA ... actually it was when I was President of the AHLA, to hold our mid-year meeting in the location of my choice, and I chose New Orleans, when I was serving, and part of it was shaped by the fact that on the very beginning of my service on the Board and we had held our Board meeting in New Orleans and it was right after Katrina hit, and I have especially vivid memories of our Board getting on a bus and driving to a school where we had an opportunity to volunteer painting the walls, scraping the walls and painting, and making a difference in the school that was really damaged by the hurricane ...

Elise: Lois?

Lois: Yes.

Elise: Oh, continue on. You blanked out for a minute, so please continue.

Lois: Oh, oh, I'm sorry.

It was physically demanding work but really meaningful for all of us and when we were done with the project and we got back in the bus and we drove back to the hotel, we were tired and we were driving through this community that was just very devastated by the hurricane. The streets just had buildings that were totally damaged and inhabitable, and it was really so evident

to us at that moment that what we did was just a small teeny piece of a very, very, very big problem for their community, and as I was reflecting on that and wondering if it made a difference at all, and I think many of us ... we sat quietly observing this in the bus, we arrived back at the hotel, as we walked in the staff formed two lines on either side of us and clapped and thanked us as we walked into the hotel.

To this moment, it still gives me the chills because it was clear that having our impact in the community, everyone did that when they arrived there it was going to make a difference for New Orleans, and to have [inaudible 00:18:45] to participate at that level and do that work is something I'm proud of and we've continued to do, at mid-year Board meetings in a number of different communities where we hold our meetings. It's impactful, so I'm really, really proud to have been a part of that.

Elise: I love that story and again, I think it shows AHLA in a way that many of our members may not know about, and opportunities at AHLA that many of our members may not know about.

I would like to end the interview by asking you if you have any thoughts on the future of healthcare law and opportunities in the area for young lawyers?

Lois: I would be happy to speak about that. I think the future [inaudible 00:19:27] right now at a point in this interview where there's a lot of turmoil whether the ACA is going to stay in effect, or not, and what's going to happen at the national state level. But I would say that ACA or no ACA, health law is a complex landscape of laws and regulations at this [inaudible 00:19:45] in a very, very challenging environment and there will be a lot that will be going on in health law going forward.

So young people who are looking at this as an opportunity for their career focus and growth, I think, have great opportunities to influence and shape the laws in our communities and at the state and federal level to effectively have, and to interpret them and work on them for those clients, in ways that will help us move forward.

I think health law experts will be needed to help their clients navigate through all these changes, and I think the AHLA can serve as continually as that important resource. We need to be [inaudible 00:20:26] pieces where I think there's a lot of movement to health lawyers are doing and that younger lawyers who are involved in health lawyers are really speaking about the importance of is bringing in and engaging and attracting practitioners from all backgrounds and types of practices, geographies all around the country, diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Our future really depends on our voice being wide and encompassing for all of those voices as health care is [inaudible 00:20:53] and I am really optimistic about this next generation teaching us about how we best communicate with each other. Giving us new ideas of how to be approaching the complex issues that are in front of us and for our voices all to be working together as health lawyers as we move forward.