Experiential Activity
Field Visit to Mayo Clinic’s Corporate Ethics officer
Introduction

Entering the office of the Mayo Clinic’s Corporate Compliance and Integrity Officer I was pleasantly surprised by the modest size, location, and general tone of the office. The office was small but well organized and windowless. There was no solid oak desk or fancy office furniture. The environment was surprisingly similar to my own office. Greg Warner warmly welcomed me inside. We shook hands and introduced ourselves. I thanked him for finding the time to meet with me. Prior to the meeting I had done my research. I read the Mayo Clinic compliance and Integrity booklet, and looked into the numerous committees Greg sat on or chaired. Assuming that he must be a very busy person, I respectfully asked for only 30 minutes of his day.

Greg apologized for the lack of space in his office but offered me a seat in the lone chair in the corner. He pushed aside a large suitcase and pulled the chair into the center of the office asking me to excuse the suitcase saying “it is an ethical dilemma”. This immediately peaked my interest so I asked what do you mean, the suitcase is an ethical dilemma? I was thinking to myself, “What could employees possibly be doing with a suitcase that presents an ethical dilemma”? Greg must have seen the curiosity in my eyes. He asked what I would do if a wealthy customer offered me an expensive watch for the extraordinary services I had provided to him/her. I’m no fool, and I did my research. Mayo Clinic explicitly states in the Compliance and Integrity Policy that accepting gifts from patients is strictly prohibited. I responded by saying “thank you for the gesture, but I am not allowed to accept gifts as an employee of the Mayo Clinic”. He said, “Good answer”, but for some it’s not that simple.
This is just another situation in the day of the life of the Mayo Clinic’s Corporate Compliance and Integrity Officer.

**Personal/Professional Information**

Greg J. Warner struck me as a very intelligent charismatic man. He seemed like more of a teacher than an enforcer or compliance officer. Most of my questions were answered with questions of his own. He is passionate about his job and it appears that he sincerely believes that ethics, and more specifically, correct moral and ethical decisions help to improve not only the business but the community as a whole. His official job title is the Director of Compliance. He is the founder of the corporate compliance and integrity (ethics) office at Mayo clinic and he has been in this position since 1999. When I asked him about a formal job description he apologized and said that one hadn’t yet been created. When it was time for him to step down or move on he would work with the HR department on creating the job description and job requirements/qualifications. However he did go into the activities he does on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis. Greg’s responsibilities range from taking phone calls from employees who need advice in specific situations to working with the board of directors and executives to establish policies regarding the ethics of the organization as a whole.

(See below for the list of committees Greg participates in)

- Audit and Compliance Committee
- Compliance and Enterprise Risk Management Committee
- Compliance Committee
Current Ethical Issues

Greg mentioned several ethical issues facing Medical organizations today, but one of the most interesting and most difficult was the denying services to patients. As a medical organization your goal is the well being of the community and Mayo’s core value statement is clear, “The needs of the patient come first”. The dilemma comes into play when there are patients that cannot afford the medical services Mayo provides. Greg offered some statistics about amount of actual payment Mayo receives based on the insurance or government assisted medical program paying for the services. In short some patients are not as profitable as others. Mayo would love to help everyone who needed it but if it did, the organization will eventually run out of money and go out of business. So, where is the line drawn, and who decides. There is legislation on this topic, but Greg and I didn’t get into that. In the end each Medical organization is responsible for its own finances and how many of each type of patient it can provide services to. These are tough decisions for an organization to make.

As for ethical issues that are waning in importance, Greg didn’t have any specific examples. He said that “most ethical issues don’t go away or become less important, they are just pushed aside by other hotter topic issues at the time”. Allowing these issues to be forgotten about would be a mistake. As soon as you start ignoring them, they become bigger issues all over again.
Handling of Ethical/Compliance/Integrity Violations

The handling of ethical violations is one of the more difficult tasks assigned to the corporate ethics officer at Mayo Clinic. Greg believes that establishing a standard consequence for each violation is the ultimate goal. Unfortunately this presents problems. For example: Electronic Medical Records access. If an employee has access to the electronic medical record system, then they have access to every medical record on file. The compliance and integrity program states that employees should under no circumstances view/print medical records that are not related directly to the patient or the job they are doing. What is the consequence if an employee just looks at a friend’s medical record out of concern? What is the consequence if an employee looks at the medical record of a famous person or public figure? Should the consequences be different? If the information is disclosed to the media, the consequences to the business are certainly different.

Under most circumstances at Mayo an ethical or code of conduct violation by an employee is reported to the compliance and integrity program. The information is passed on to HR who then works with the compliance and integrity program and the employee’s supervisor to determine the consequences. Consequences can range from “hey don’t do that again” to termination. Ethical and code of conduct violations happen every day at Mayo. Most violations go un-noticed. A website has been set up by the compliance and integrity program to allow for anonymous reports of violations.

What I learned from this experience
I learned that ethical dilemmas are a part of an organization in two ways. First, the ethics of the organization as a whole and the business decisions it makes. Second, the ethics of each individual working for an organization. Both are important to an organization. Mayo has policies for both the organization and the individuals within the organization to follow. Consequences for ethical violations can be even more difficult to determine than what is ethical or not. The goal of an organization is to establish consistent standards for the consequences of ethical violations.

Conclusion

My experience meeting Greg J. Warner was a great one. He provided insight into ethical issues that affect not only the patients of Mayo Clinic, but that also affect myself and the rest of society. Greg’s thought provoking ideas and opinions left me thinking hard about what I would do in his situation.

So what is the ethical dilemma regarding the suitcase (I know you're curious)? A prince from the Middle East has been in Rochester receiving medical care from the Mayo Clinic. He was so pleased with the level of service provided from some individuals he offered each person a gift. The gifts consisted of a very expensive watch. The watches were individually wrapped and labeled with who they were intended for. Each watch was valued at approx. $15,000 a piece. I didn’t see the watches myself, but judging by the size of the suitcase, there could’ve been up to 100 watches in total. Some employees didn’t understand why they couldn’t accept a gift intended specifically for them. Greg had the fun responsibility of explaining the circumstances to these unfortunate employees.
At the end of the interview I stood up, thanked Greg for his time and information. I intended the meeting to be an interview but it ended up as a discussion. Even though I only requested 30 minutes of Greg’s time, we talked for nearly 90 minutes. The experience provided insight into the ethics of the organization I work for and gave me a new appreciation for the difficult decisions an ethics officer is faced with on a daily basis. I would strongly encourage others to do this experiential activity. Not every business decision in an organization is based on profits. As MBA students I think we all should experience a real life application of what we learn in class.

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