

AHL

LEGAL

Nausheen Rokerya Asks “Who Do I Want to Be?”

AUGUST 21, 2023

VNS Health’s Nausheen Rokerya shares her path to law and her efforts to solve one of healthcare’s most pressing problems



Noah Johnson, August 21, 2023

Young people are often asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” But Nausheen Rokerya believes that asking “Who do I want to be?” or “What part of the human experience do I want to improve?” can be just as valuable. As early as her teenage years, she began to visualize the type of lawyer and leader she would one day become.

“Activities I participated in during high school, like model congress and mock trial, helped cultivate my appreciation for the US legal model, perspective, and the art of persuasion. But it was my part-time job at a fast food restaurant that first sparked my interest in the law as it relates to the workplace,” she reflects. “When applying to college, I worked backwards, seeking out labor and employment practitioners to identify the various career paths they’d taken. Since I’d identified an area of interest, I wanted to be deliberate with my choices, and this exercise helped inform my decision to pursue a specialized undergraduate degree.”

Her thoughtful process and planning set her up for academic success at as an industrial and labor relations major at Cornell University, Brooklyn Law School, and subsequently, as an associate in Proskauer’s Labor and Employment Department. There, she gained valuable exposure to the unique operational realities of clients across a diverse array of industries, including financial services, hospitality, retail, entertainment, and healthcare. It was here that she recognized her desire to bring her talents to the healthcare industry as an in-house attorney.

“Often, there is no ideal solution. My goal is to inform my clients so they can make the decision that gets them the closest.”

Nausheen Rokerya

In 2014, she moved to VNS Health, one of the nation's largest nonprofit home- and community-based healthcare agencies, where she currently serves as vice president and associate general counsel. In her unique role, she operates at the intersection of labor and employment law and healthcare law, and she leans into that space to transform the future of home care.

Rokerya has worked hard to bridge an awareness gap that often exists among healthcare businesses, labor organizations, and agencies and regulators. Through various matters she's worked on, she's helped key stakeholders understand relevant legal and operational challenges find common ground. She's successfully steered these groups toward practice and policy reform that has ultimately enhanced compliance with both employment and healthcare laws, while improving outcomes for patients and members.

"There are plenty of patient- or member-centric considerations often grounded in regulatory requirements that may not be top of mind for the typical plaintiff-side labor and employment practitioner or government agency," she says. "The reverse is also true. Traditional healthcare attorneys or regulatory bodies do not always understand or consider the relevant labor and employment laws that impact the way in which healthcare services are provided. Businesses are often left confused about how to navigate the disconnect.

"By serving at the intersection of these practice areas," she continues, "I've helped facilitate a more holistic understanding of the various legal considerations in a way that drives better business decisions and ultimately supports better patient outcomes. Everyone wins."



Those efforts are more important now than ever in a post-pandemic world, as healthcare businesses continue to navigate a shifting regulatory landscape, labor shortages, high levels of government audit activity, and a reignited labor movement. Rokerya hopes her work will help leaders make informed and compliant decisions as they seek to improve both quality of care and employee engagement.

Since joining the company, Rokerya has served as the lead advisor on a host of employment-related COVID-19 regulations, and helped overhaul and bolster VNS Health's policies pertaining to the provision of interpretive services to deaf and hard-of-hearing patients. Additionally, she manages a team that is engaged in an active revamp of the medical record production function, with an eye toward simplifying the record-request process to enhance the patient experience while supporting continued HIPAA compliance. She credits these strides to her agility, and ability to help her business clients understand—not just hear—about risks.

“Often, there is no ideal solution. My goal is to inform my clients so they can make the decision that gets them the closest,” Rokerya explains. “The fact that I work at a mission-driven organization where everyone agrees that the patient's well-being is central to our operations is also very helpful. Leaning into that common ground helps me calibrate and ease into conversations amongst management, labor, and third parties like other lawyers or regulators.”

Before working at VNS Health, Rokerya had years of diverse legal experiences. She developed a strong legal foundation as an intern at the Office of the Attorney General for Washington, DC; the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in New York City; and Kings County Supreme Court in Brooklyn.

Rokerya advises young lawyers seeking professional success to actively seek out mentors whose jobs they can see themselves enjoying one day. “Find people doing the jobs and living the lives you want, whose paths resonate with you,” she says. “There's no one way to get there, but humanizing the process of finding your passions and following them has never failed me.”

American Healthcare Leader is a free subscription magazine bringing together healthcare professionals and covering running healthcare businesses in the industry. American Healthcare Leader is the source for all healthcare questions, needs, standards and policies. It receives an average 29,600 visits monthly to their website.