Alumna’s Practice Focuses on Elder and Disability Law

FIRM: ELROD-HILL LAW FIRM LLC, Peachtree Corners, Georgia
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ATTORNEY: Patricia Elrod-Hill, JD ’89

AREAS OF PRACTICE: Estate Planning, Elder Law, and Disability Law

YEAR FOUNDED: 2003

BRIEF BACKGROUND: Patricia Elrod-Hill, CELA, is Certified as an Elder Law Attorney by the National Elder Law Foundation. She was admitted to practice law in Georgia in 1989. Before launching her solo practice, she was a staff attorney in the Office of Regional Counsel, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from 1990 to 2002. At the VA, she practiced health care law, medical malpractice, employment law, and information law. She now concentrates her practice in the areas of estate planning and elder and disability law. She counsels clients in many complex areas of estate planning, including wills and trusts, estate tax, special needs, and Medicaid and VA benefits.

Q: Why did you decide to form a solo firm?
A: After practicing law for 13 years, I wanted control of my own schedule, clients, and case load. I realized that my favorite part of practicing law was client contact—I wanted to develop close relationships with my clients and wanted them to see me as a counselor. A solo firm would allow me to develop those relationships.

Q: Why did you choose your particular area of practice?
A: When I decided to leave the VA, I thought about what I loved about practicing law and what strengths I had developed, as well as what I did not like about practicing law. I realized that I had a lot of experience with elderly veterans and their health care and legal and financial issues. I also realized that I wanted to help older clients who had some real fears and concerns about facing the future with declining capacity and limited resources to pay for their increasing health care challenges. I had a good deal of experience interpreting regulations and rules, and I thought that an elder law and estate planning practice would allow me to have a lot of time one-on-one with clients. I was also eager to apply the skills I had developed in interpreting regulations and working with government rules and bureaucracies. I knew I no longer wanted to do litigation, so I chose an area of practice where I did not have to litigate too much.

Q: What aspects of your education at Washington University prepared you for your career?
A: I took many tax classes and at least one estate planning class, and those courses helped tremendously. I also participated in the Client Counseling Competition, which introduced me to strategies for getting information from clients efficiently, while also developing relationships with them. In addition, the pieces that I wrote for the first-year legal writing class and for the Law Review were about VA benefits and about housing regulations; both are subjects that I deal with daily in my practice. Additionally, since my small firm is also a business, the course I took on forming business entities and taxation of business entities has been very valuable to me.

Q: What advice would you have for someone interested in pursuing this area of law?
A: Study as much property, real estate, tax, and estate planning law as you can, and visit—or better yet volunteer—at assisted living facilities and nursing homes to develop an idea of the real problems your clients will have. Then try to work for pay or volunteer at a legal clinic or law firm where you may be required to assist with housing, Social Security, and health care issues for persons with disabilities. I also would recommend joining the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) as a student and attending the conference for Basics Day that is held in the spring. (Next year, the NAELA conference will be here in Atlanta.)

Q: What has been the most rewarding aspect of your practice or case you have handled?
A: Every day I am rewarded when I sit with a family facing a crisis in caring for a loved one with a disability or a health care issue, and I am able to offer them some hope and some solutions.