

From the Hospital Room to the Courtroom and Beyond

A trio of Marquette nursing graduates discover their patient-care experiences unite them as attorneys practicing at the same firm.

BY LORA STRUM PHOTO BY CHRIS GUILLEN

Sarah Frazer had just started as a trial attorney at Hall Prangle and Schoonveld LLC when she walked into the office of now-managing partner Marilee (Wiesemes) Clausing and noticed something. On the wall was a diploma from the Marquette University College of Nursing. Frazer had the same degree waiting to be hung in her new office. Frazer, Nurs '04, discovered that not only is Clausing an alumna and a nurse, but that their colleague Ann (Kettelson) Ford, Nurs '83, also pursued nursing before becoming a partner at HPS. "We're always looking for nurse attorneys," Clausing, Nurs '78, says. A nursing background, she explains, brings a practicality to casework that tempers the "ivory tower view other lawyers may have about how things are done in a hospital." Clausing, a former obstetrical nurse, has spent more than three decades in law and concentrates her practice primarily in birth trauma defense. Frazer, after 11 years as a nurse in the intensive care unit and quality and patient care, is a fifth-year attorney

focusing on medical malpractice lawsuits. Ford, with nine years in high-risk obstetrics, pediatrics and neonatology nursing, 11 years in professional liability practice and over a decade in health care law and compliance, now advises clients on health care law, compliance and transactions.

While the path from nurse to attorney isn't well-trodden, Frazer, Ford and Clausing know it's their nursing backgrounds that help them better serve clients. "I've always said working as a nurse, you have to think on your feet. You have to improvise," Ford says. "Those are skills ... that translated into my work as a lawyer."

For Frazer, the lure of the law resided in the chance to deepen her knowledge of health care at and away from the bedside. At Marquette, she was taught to see the bigger picture, and the medical malpractice field relies on her ability to take that step back and assess a situation. "Medicine is not as black and white as TV shows make it appear to be. There's a lot of balance that goes into caring for patients."



"Working as a nurse, you have to think on your feet. You have to improvise. Those are skills ... that translated into my work as a lawyer."

ANN (KETTELSON) FORD

Above: (left to right) Attorneys and nursing alumnae Sarah Frazer, Marilee Clausing and Ann Ford

Understanding that balance is what helps Clausing litigate cases grappling with traumatic events — from fetal brain damage to maternal death — from a place of kindness. When clinicians are second-guessing their care or parents are grieving, she tries to explain and empathize the same way she did as a nurse with a patient. This brand of professionalism is one she first discovered in herself at Marquette, and one that has served her throughout her 35-year career in law.

Ford agrees that, whether helping physicians navigate tricky telemedicine regulations during the coronavirus pandemic or counseling major hospitals on how to reduce risk to improve care, centering her practice on humanity is what makes clients trust her.

As a mentor to Marquette's nursing program, Ford always tells students that being a Marquette Nurse will open doors to rooms they never thought they'd enter. "As a nurse you gain a lot of the soft skills to succeed in the boardroom, the courtroom — anywhere. The opportunities are endless."