

# AHL

## Piyush Sharma Is Alexion Pharmaceuticals' Compliance Architect

Piyush Sharma shapes Alexion Pharmaceuticals' compliance program keeping patients' best interests in mind

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Leadership

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[Piyush Sharma](#) says going in-house was the turning point of his career. The current senior vice president and deputy chief compliance officer at biotech company [Alexion Pharmaceuticals Inc.](#) says that moving from a law firm where billing hours were the norm into a space where he genuinely felt he could help a company and its employees made all the difference in the world.

Sharma has accumulated significant experience in the healthcare, oil and gas, and technology sectors, while becoming an expert in all things compliance, especially antibribery and anticorruption issues. Sharma's talent for, and willingness, to build out extensive compliance projects has made him invaluable in multiple industries, but he's happy to be back in healthcare. "For me, what I take pride in is helping the company and providing guidance and clarity to our employees," Sharma says. "I want to make a difference by supporting the patients we serve and our employees."

Sharma's compliance work at Alexion is no small feat. The company does business in about fifty countries, and Sharma's team is located all over the world. "It can be challenging to manage a remote international team," Sharma says. "The way we succeed is ensuring that we are coordinated and connected at all times." That means biweekly calls with his direct reports, a full compliance meeting once a month, and in-person quarterly compliance meetings. His next quarterly team meeting is in Zurich, Switzerland, and Sharma says it's key to get everyone on the same page about new directives, goals, and initiatives. "We need to make sure we are speaking with one voice and have consistency in our approach, even when there are a lot of moving parts and the business is moving quickly," he says.

Operating in a global capacity means it's essential for Sharma to be in touch with regional and local compliance officers who are experts in their respective regions. "I travel the world, but having a team in place where colleagues can be on the ground is very impactful," Sharma says.

Although navigating Alexion's roughly 2,500-person global organization may seem daunting, Sharma's first in-house role at Pfizer included about eighty thousand employees when he left. "What we do here is very impactful and felt across the organization, much more directly than in a larger organization," he says. "It's part of what I like so much about working at Alexion." This year, those key actions have included launching a new antibribery/anticorruption (ABAC) program, which included new policies, procedures, systems, and trainings.

The new ABAC program Sharma and his team deployed included building a transactional approval system from the ground up in partnership with New York-based software company Lextegrity. The ABAC system implemented by Lextegrity has been user-friendly, engaging, and accessible on multiple device platforms, and available in several languages. It has resulted in Sharma's team looking for more opportunities to advance the global compliance program by incorporating reporting and predictive analytics.

Building out these programs is Sharma's specialty, and it's where he feels he's able to be most effective. "For me, the biggest challenge is building a compliance program, but I think it's also the most rewarding kind of experience as a compliance officer," Sharma says. "Ultimately, you're helping shape the culture of the company."

Sharma says that in his past positions, as well as in his current role, he's been fortunate to implement compliance programs in the best of circumstances: the right tone from the top leaders, management support, and appropriate oversight.

He says it's that sort of forward-looking leadership that helps sustain and evolve the role of compliance as more than a department that the rest of the organization fears. "We're working daily to shift the perception of compliance from the traditional policing role to a transformative one," Sharma says. "We're working with our business partners and stakeholders to support strategic imperatives, and we want to be seen as a business partner with a seat at the table."

Once compliance is looked at not only as more than a function that puts on Band-Aids but also as a valuable contributing voice, that sort of paradigm shift has far-reaching and important reverberations, Sharma says. "Rolling out policies, procedures, and processes will always be part of the compliance function," Sharma says. "But I think the most successful compliance officers are the ones who are engaged and embedded within the business, working seamlessly with stakeholders to support organizational objectives and strategy."

Understanding the business and its people helps compliance officers transform a company's culture to a competitive advantage for the business, Sharma says. This is especially true in the healthcare sector, where patients entrust their lives to companies such as Alexion. Because the stakes are so high, a healthcare company's ability to deliver on its mission starts with its values and reputation. Sharma says that working in healthcare has given him a purpose, and he's committed to helping his company make the largest impact it can because lives literally depend on it. "Our drugs treat rare and fatal diseases," Sharma says. "I am part of a mission to serve our patients, and I am focused on what we can do, as a function and more broadly within the enterprise, to help the patient journey."