



Vickie Milazzo: President and CEO of Vickie Milazzo Institute, Houston, TX

[By Judith Earley]

One day in 1981 changed critical care nurse Vickie Milazzo's life forever

A friend of hers, who was a psychiatric nurse, shared her experience of testifying as an expert witness in a legal case. Milazzo read the deposition from start to finish and was instantly attracted to the relationship between nursing and the law. The term "legal nurse consultant" did not yet exist, but on that day, Milazzo committed herself to becoming a consultant to attorneys.

Milazzo said she immediately recognized several things. "First of all, nurses have tremendous healthcare skills and experience and insider knowledge of the healthcare system that attorneys simply don't have, and it's extremely valuable to them," said Milazzo. "Any nurse willing to do a bit of trailblazing could make a huge difference in the legal arena by consulting with attorneys on medical-related cases. It only made sense that attorneys needed help from consulting experts behind the scenes, not just from testifying experts."

Milazzo was a practicing nurse for six years prior to creating the new career opportunity of legal nurse consulting. She said she decided to go to law school because she believed a law degree, combined with her master's degree in nursing with a concentration in education, would uniquely qualify her to train RNs as legal nurse consultants who could offer attorneys a whole new level of service. Milazzo has now been an attorney for 19 years and still maintains both her nursing and law licenses.

While building her legal nurse consulting practice by day, Milazzo attended law school

by night, earning her J.D. from South Texas College of Law. After establishing her own career as a legal nurse consultant, Milazzo committed herself to helping other nurses do the same. She opened Medical-Legal Consulting Institute, Inc., and began training Certified Legal Nurse Consultants (CLNCs®), registered nurses who use specialized healthcare knowledge and expertise to consult with attorneys on medical-related cases.

"No legal nurse consulting course existed to guide me," said Milazzo. "I literally had to write the book myself, and I established the first educational institute for legal nurse consulting. Since founding Vickie Milazzo Institute in 1982, I've taught more than 20,000 RNs how to apply their nursing skills and expertise to all kinds of health-related legal cases—medical malpractice, personal injury, products liability, toxic tort, workers' compensation, criminal, and a wide range of other cases where health, injury, or illness is an issue."

CLNC®s can conduct research, interpret medical records, prepare timelines and chronologies uncovering gaps, inconsistencies, or tampering in medical records, prepare reports and summaries of medical records, and locate expert witnesses. "Nurses are natural detectives," said Milazzo. "And although most CLNC®s work behind the scenes, they may also serve as expert witnesses."

CLNC®s have consulted on cases as simple as those involving neck injuries caused

by auto accidents, as high-profile as the Rodney King case, and as groundbreaking as the litigation concerning Vioxx, Fen-Phen, and silicone implants. Their expertise is also valuable to attorneys handling cases involving medical malpractice, workers' compensation, and environmental issues. As a member of the litigation team, a CLNC® helps to educate attorneys, jury members, plaintiffs, defendants, and judges about medical-related issues.

According to Milazzo, the most pressing legal issue today is educating the public about their rights to file lawsuits in medical malpractice or personal injury cases. "Statistics show that 268 people die every day due to medical negligence," said Milazzo. "It's an epidemic that causes more deaths than AIDS, breast cancer, and car accidents combined."

Milazzo said that her greatest business achievement and greatest reward is making a positive difference in the lives of nurses and in the country's legal system. She added that the person who influenced her the most was her first attorney client. "Even though the legal nurse consulting field was not invented yet, he was willing to take a chance and go where no lawyer had gone before. He gave me an opportunity to create a profession that had not existed and, along the way, provided a crash course on the workings of the legal system."

Working and living in Houston with her husband, Tom, Milazzo's advice to law students is to live and work passionately.



"My passion, besides my business, is traveling the world. I take 10 weeks of vacation every year and love visiting places such as Cambodia, Vietnam, the Serengeti Plains of Africa, Morocco, Patagonia, and other fascinating parts of the world," said Milazzo. "I'm also passionate about writing. My first nationally published book is currently in the top 5 percent of all business books sold nationwide. *Inside Every Woman:*

Using the 10 Strengths You Didn't Know You Had to Get the Career and Life You Want Now is now in its fourth printing."

ON THE NET

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Inside Every Woman: Using the 10 Strengths You Didn't Know You Had to Get the Career and Life You Want Now

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