



STEVEN EPSTEIN IN NEW YORK CITY AT BRYANT PARK.

a healthy career

Health care law specialist **STEVEN EPSTEIN '68**, a trailblazer in the field, has perfected the art of doing well by doing good

BY JENNIFER V. HUGHES

STEVEN B. EPSTEIN was working as a Wall Street lawyer in the early 1970s when he got an intriguing phone call from a friend.

"He asked me to come down and help out in Washington with some health care issues," recalls the 1968 Law School graduate. When Epstein replied that he didn't know anything about health care law, his friend had a ready-made response: "No one knows anything about health care on the legal side."

Epstein did some research on the subject but came up empty, and the fact that it was an entirely new field of law made the offer more enticing. He spent a year working for what was then the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, traveling to 30 states encouraging lawmakers to pass legislation allowing health maintenance organizations to organize. In addition, he helped write the landmark 1973 U.S. law that promoted HMO formation.

That year, Epstein's success in the field also led him to found his own firm, Epstein Becker & Green, with a health care focus. The firm has 400 lawyers in 10 cities, representing a broad swath of clients on an ever-expanding range of issues—everything from

EPSTEIN HAS BEEN REFERRED TO AS THE FATHER OF THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY.

mergers and acquisitions to new patient privacy laws to the FDA approval process to Medicare and Medicaid regulations.

More than 35 years after that fateful telephone conversation, Epstein is a legend in the field. The rankings group Chambers USA once called him the "father of the health care industry," an honorific that is not hyperbole, says Stephanie Kanwit, who graduated from the Law School the same year as Epstein and serves as special counsel to two health care trade associations. "He's very practical and very perspicacious," she says. "He can look at a hugely complex set of facts and see immediately what the common thread is."

Epstein, who lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Deborah, and has four children, says he fell in love with health care law almost immediately.

"Here was a brand-new field that needed solutions to difficult problems," he says, "and there were no laws to deal with it."

Even as a boy, Epstein says he wanted to be an attorney.

"Maybe it was Perry Mason," he quips. His father earned a law degree but never practiced, working instead in the garment industry. And Epstein says he was drawn to the law not as a winner-take-all proposition but as a businessman.

"Negotiation to me was always like a puzzle," he says. "If you saw what the problem was and understood your clients' needs, most of the time you could come to a solution that worked for both sides. I was always disappointed when I saw lawyers pounding the table and demanding everything."

Epstein balances his professional passions with a healthy dose of charity work. He serves as chairman of the Columbia Law School Board of Visitors, as well as on the boards of Tufts University and the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. And his firm helps underwrite and provides free space for a leadership program for young African-American men.

Additionally, Epstein has had the honor of receiving distinguished alumni awards from both his undergraduate university, Tufts (in 1999) and Columbia Law School (in 2007). In February, he will be awarded Columbia's Medal for Excellence—the Law School's most prestigious award.

Looking forward, Epstein says the country must focus on the millions of uninsured Americans.

"One initial way to address this complex and difficult issue would be to arrange for the universal provision of catastrophic care," cases of major illness or injury, Epstein says. "Most people can deal with issues related to going to the doctor for nominal amounts of money, but if they end up with something really serious . . . there is no way those people can afford to pay for it, and we all get stuck with the bill, ultimately."

He is also passionate about wellness programs and serves on the board of a South African health care company that gives members rewards for staying healthy.

"It can be hard to get employers, unions, and managed care companies to focus on wellness when basic health care coverage can be so expensive," Epstein says. "But, eventually people will come to realize that keeping people healthy through wellness programs will ultimately save millions of dollars and millions of lives." 

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