

Rising Star: Akin Gump's Katherine Katchen

By Ryan Davis

Law360, New York (April 08, 2010) -- Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP partner Katherine Katchen has represented Independence Blue Cross and its subsidiaries in numerous reimbursement cases around the country for the past decade, including in a national class action settlement, earning her a spot on Law360's list of 10 insurance lawyers under 40 to watch.

Katchen, 37, is the hiring partner for the firm's Philadelphia office. She has dedicated much of her work over the past 10 years to defending Philadelphia-based Independence Blue Cross in a series of individual and class action cases filed by health providers and professional medical societies over the insurer's reimbursement practices.

The suits have been filed in several states and involve "just about any kind of legal theory you can think of," Katchen said, including the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, Employee Retirement Income Security Act claims and numerous theories under state statutory and common law.

In those cases, Katchen and Akin Gump have secured several important victories, including two denials of class certification and several voluntary and involuntary dismissals. The victories helped set the stage for a national class action settlement against all U.S. Blue Cross/Blue Shield health insurance plans in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida.

The approximately \$130 million settlement in that RICO suit involved nearly 1 million doctors who claimed that Blue Cross companies systematically denied or diminished payments owed to them. Akin Gump said the settlement was the most favorable achieved by a health insurer in similar litigation.

"That was certainly the most challenging and significant professional experience I've had," Katchen said.

Though much of her work involves issues related to insurance, Katchen has a broad range of legal experience. She has represented insurance companies in employment and other types of cases and has worked on numerous cases with no insurance angle.

Her noninsurance work has included a telecommunications patent suit, antitrust class actions involving building materials and a series of breach of contract cases involving Internet security firms.

When specializing in insurance law, "so many issues come up that it keeps things interesting and it develops your knowledge base in a lot of other areas," she said.

Katchen is also the Philadelphia office's practice group leader for the Support Center for Child Advocates, an organization that provides pro bono legal services for abused and neglected children in the city. Her work with the group has included advocating for children in foster care and serving as an attorney for children who need to be a witness in court.

Katchen earned an undergraduate degree from Villanova University and a law degree from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. She made partner in 2006 at the age of 33.

"I've been extremely fortunate that the people I've worked with have given me opportunities based on merit, not on age," she said. "It's been such a gift."

She said that while her position as a young partner has on occasion raised concern among her older colleagues, the age difference has never been a hindrance in her career.

"I think some of the people I've dealt with might have a preconception that because I'm young, I'm not as experienced or knowledgeable," she said. "But once they realize I know what I'm doing, I know my stuff and I'm always prepared, that goes away."

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