

Overview of Medical- Legal Partnerships

AACI

About LegalHealth

- A division of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)
- Founded in 2001
- Largest Medical-Legal Partnership in the nation
- Currently at 38 hospitals and community-based health centers, with new clinics opening soon
- Along with general legal clinics, LegalHealth operates specialized clinics for people living with cancer, veterans, and immigrants.



Additional LegalHealth Programs and Projects

- Standby Guardianship Phone Line
- Project Assist for Care Givers
- Healthy Homes Project
- Cancer Advocacy Project
- NIH Study
- National Cancer Legal Services Network (NCLSN)
- Training Center of Excellence
- Pro Bono Justice Bridge Clinics
 - Visa extensions
 - Advanced planning
 - Standby guardianship
- Legal Navigators



Medical-Legal Partnership Model

- A Medical-Legal Partnership is a health care delivery model that improves the health and well-being of low-income and other vulnerable populations by addressing unmet legal needs and removing legal barriers that impede health.
- Healthcare is most effective when it targets the source of the person's health problem, and because legal needs have a significant impact on health, it's important that they are addressed as part of healthcare.



What Does an MLP Do?

- Partners with medical professionals to address the social drivers of health impacting low-income people with serious health problems
- Advocates on behalf of low-income patients to ensure that their basic needs for food, shelter, medical care, financial stability and safety are met
- Trains healthcare providers to help address the non-medical, legal issues their patients face



Different MLP Models

- Health care system partners with an external legal organization that will provide legal services to patients
- Health care systems hire attorneys directly to address the health harming legal needs of patients.
- Law school clinics partner with health care systems and students, under the supervision of their professor/attorney, provide legal assistance to patients, often with a specific focus, like people living with cancer or veterans' issues.
- The American Bar Association has a Medical Legal Partnership Interest Group that promotes the development of MLPs. Furthermore, the ABA provides resources to support MLPs, pro bono matching, and helps to expand access to care through policy advocacy. In addition, MLPs have partnerships with Bar Associations.



Impact

- Healthcare professionals now have a new and integral team member to assist with addressing social drivers of health.
- By helping patients with their legal issues and by training healthcare professionals on identifying these issues and referral opportunities, the medical-legal partnership creates a more holistic patient treatment program
- For legal professionals, medical-legal partnerships offer a novel mode to provide civil legal services to vulnerable populations.



A Brief History of MLPs

- **1967:** Delta Health Center in Mound Bayo, Mississippi hired a lawyer to address housing and food insecurity of patients
- **1980s:** During the AIDs epidemic, healthcare institutions started to work closely with civil legal organizations on advance planning for AIDs patients.
- **1993:** Boston Medical Center found that pediatric asthma patients, who were not responding to treatment, often lived in homes with mold and other health harming conditions. They connected with the Greater Boston Legal Services and formed the first Medical-Legal Partnership
- **2001:** The New York Times ran a story on the above partnership, leading to increased interest and development of MLPs
- **2001:** LegalHealth was founded, now the country's largest MLP
- **2006:** The National Center for Medical-Legal Partnerships launched.



MLPs Across the Country

- Medical-Legal Partnerships currently exist in 49 states and the District of Columbia
- 138 General hospitals & health systems
- 163 HRSA funded health centers
- 37 Children's hospitals
- 83 other healthcare sites
- 29 Veterans Affairs Medical Centers



Social Drivers of Health

- Social Drivers of Health are the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work, play, and age, as well as the systems designed to improve health and treat illness.
- Many of these social conditions can be traced to laws that are unfairly applied or under-enforced, often leading to the improper denial of services and benefits that are designed to help vulnerable people.



Health Care Disparities Low-Income Patients Face



Many Socioeconomic and Healthcare Disparities Have Legal Solutions

Substandard Housing

- Legal right to housing repair

Housing Instability

- Eviction prevention

Lack of Insurance

- Insurance access, appeals & other remedies

Food Insecurity

- Appeals of benefit reduction/denial

Lack of immigration status

- Immigration remedies

Employment uncertainties

- Legal rights of employees

Lack of family/caregiver support

- Homecare eligibility

Patients' and families' inability to manage environment

- Advance directives

Range Of Legal Services in MLPs

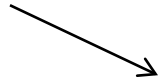
- Government Benefits
 - SSI/SSDI
 - Public Assistance
 - Food Stamps
- Insurance Disputes
 - Medicaid
 - Medicare
 - Commercial
- Housing
- Immigration
- Debtor/Creditor Issues
- Workplace accommodations
- Advance Planning: e.g., will, health care proxy, power of attorney and permanency planning



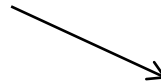
Workflow of a Legal Clinic



Social Workers, CHWs, and health care partners are **trained to screen patients** to determine whether they require legal intervention.



Patients are **referred** to the legal clinic attorney. Prioritize patients with serious and chronic health issues and significant barriers to care.



Legal clinic attorney conducts a thorough **intake** and begins **working with the patient/client** on addressing their various legal needs.



Proven Benefits of Medical-Legal Partnerships

- MLPs can improve health and patient quality of life, increase the knowledge and efficiency of the health care workforce, and reduce health care costs. Studies show:
 - Significant improvements in asthma severity, prednisone courses, and ER visits in the group of patients who received legal assistance as compared to the group of patients who did not receive intervention. (*Environmental Improvements Brought by the Legal Interventions in the Homes of Poorly Controlled Inner-city Adult Asthmatic Patients: A Proof-of-Concept Study. Journal of Asthma, 2012*)
 - Patients better comply with health care treatments after their legal needs have been addressed by an MLP (*Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved and Journal of Clinical Oncology*)



Proven Benefits of Medical-Legal Partnerships (cont.)

- Increased health care staff satisfaction when a medical-legal partnership program is part of the health care services at the health care site (*Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*)
- Medical-legal partnerships save patients health care costs and recover cash benefits (*Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved and Journal of Palliative Medicine*)
- Medical-legal partnership reduces health care spending on high-cost, high-use patients (*Health Affairs*)



Proven Financial Value of MLP Services: Medicaid Payments

- MLPs serve many uninsured and underinsured patients. Some of these patients have been receiving uncompensated care at health systems for years
- By helping these patients to become Medicaid eligible, through immigration work and other Medicaid advocacy, MLPs moves them from uncompensated to compensated care.
- This can lead to Medicaid reimbursement and payment for the hospital system and also means that the patients have insurance coverage for future medical care.
- In a way, MLPs pays for themselves, while also providing numerous social and financial benefits for the entire hospital system and community.



Funding MLPs

- Much of MLP funding comes from the health system itself
- Special projects and additional funding may come from private foundations, city, and/or federal funding
 - For example, LegalHealth gets foundation funding for some of our cancer work and other programs
- The cost of funding an MLP can differ from state to state, but typically includes the cost of one full time attorney, some supervision, and some staff support from the hospital (schedulers, etc...)



MLPS for People Living with Cancer

- Increases in individuals diagnosed with cancer in the United States
- Life situation of people with cancer is uniquely complicated
- Holistic approach with other disciplines in cancer care proven effective
- Many people with cancer are working and/or middle class and therefore may encounter income eligibility issues for traditional legal services programs



Cancer Continuum

- The cancer continuum ranges from disease-free through preclinical early cancer to diagnosis, survivorship, and end of life and death, followed by bereavement of surviving family members. Legal issues throughout.
- The cancer population is extremely heterogeneous, with different types of cancers and patients, all with varied courses ranging from imminently terminal to potentially curable



MLPS in Clinical Settings

- Oncology Departments in Hospitals
- Palliative Care and Hospice Departments in hospitals
- Ambulatory Cancer Clinics
- Health Care Advocacy Groups
- Social Service Organizations



Particular Concerns When Developing MLPs for People with Cancer

- Patients can be bedridden, homebound, hospitalized for prolonged periods, or in hospice or palliative care. There the cases might be more time intensive.
- The effects of illness and treatment—fatigue, pain, altered mental status, change in physical functioning— often make it difficult for patients to follow up with service providers as required.
- Sometimes, a patient’s life expectancy may be shorter than the lengthy waits for benefit eligibility to be determined (for example, SSI/SSDI, Medicaid, and housing assistance). Therefore necessary to expedite cases.
- Referrals often from hospice or palliative care often need to be done on a emergent basis – wills, powers of attorneys, planning for minor children



Conclusion

- Any population can be served by the MLP model as well as the more generalized clinics
- Targeted MLPs may increase funding options
- In any hospital, likely to find the targeted population for a specialized MLP
- There are many targeted MLPs throughout the country, including for people living with cancer, veterans, immigrants, and more.
- Formal and informal networks of MLPs serving targeted populations exist and resources are available



THANK YOU

More information at legalhealth.org



Search “NYLAG” or “New York Legal Assistance Group” on these social media platforms.

