Medical-Legal Partnerships: A New Public Health Tool

October 13, 2011
5th Annual P2 Conference

Since 2001, LegalHealth has partnered with medical professionals to address the nonmedical needs of low-income people with serious health problems. LegalHealth complements health care with legal care – providing free legal services in medical facilities and training health care professionals to understand the legal issues their patients face.

LegalHealth is part of the New York Legal Assistance Group, a nonprofit law office.
LegalHealth Funding

• Foundations
  – Family and other private foundations
  – Disease-specific foundations
  – New York State Health Foundation
• Hospital contributions
• IOLA (Interest on Lawyer Account) Fund
• Fellowships
• Government contracts and grants

History of Medical-Legal Partnerships

• First MLP formed by the Chief of Pediatrics at Boston Medical Center in 1993
• Original MLPs focused on serving children and their families
• Currently, MLPs operate in 38 states at approximately 235 health care facilities
  – Many MLPs now serve other populations, including the elderly and single adults
• LegalHealth is the largest MLP in the US
• Many national and local coalitions, including the National Center for MLP and the NYS Coalition of MLPs
New NYS Legislation Recognizing MLP Model

- The New York Health-Related Legal Services Program legislation was enacted September 23, 2011
  - Amends NY Public Health Law to provide for recognition of medical-legal partnerships in NY
  - Promotes MLPs and establishes standards for their implementation, which will result in stabilization and expansion of MLP services in NY
  - First legislation of its kind in the US

LegalHealth Clinics in New York City

- Bellevue Hospital
- Beth Israel Medical Center
- Community Health Center of Richmond (Staten Island)
- Elmhurst Hospital
- Harlem Hospital
- Institute For Family Health
- Jacobi Medical Center
- Kings County Hospital
- Lincoln Hospital
- Maimonides Medical Center
- Mt. Sinai Hospital and Adolescent Health Center
- NYU Cancer Center
- Ralph Lauren Center for Cancer Care & Prevention
- St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital
- Woodhull Hospital
LegalHealth Handled More Than 4900 Matters in 2010

LegalHealth’s Training Curriculum

- LegalHealth has developed an extensive training curriculum designed to educate health care professionals about MLPs and legal issues patients are facing. After training, health care professionals
  - Listen to information differently
  - Identify issues and refer patients to legal clinic
  - Become more effective advocates
Training Modules

• Advocating for the Child With Special Education Needs
• Bringing Advocacy to Your Practice
• Decision Making for Health and Legal Matters - A Guide for Physicians
• Forms 101 – Completing the Forms your Patients Bring You
• Geriatrician’s Guide to Confronting Elder Abuse
• Geriatrician’s Guide to Medicare and Medicaid
• Improving Your Patients’ Housing
• Minors’ Rights to Consent to Care
• Understanding Patients’ Immigration Concerns
• Your Patient in the Workplace
• Your Pregnant Patient

Community Collaborations

• New York State Coalition of MLPs
  – LegalHealth acts as coordinator of the Coalition, which is comprised of legal and medical professionals who either have a medical-legal partnership or who are interested in starting one
  – The purpose of the Coalition is to share information, resources and best practices; support relevant legislation; advance the growth of MLPs; and support new MLPs
• Health Leads USA
  – College student volunteers work on-site in health care settings and accept “prescriptions” for non-medical, health-critical conditions such as food insecurity or unsafe housing
  – LegalHealth and Health Leads provide cross-referrals at Harlem and Woodhull
Collaborations, cont’d

• H.P. Freeman Patient Navigation Institute
  – Patient navigators work to eliminate barriers to timely cancer screening, diagnosis, treatment, and supportive care.
  – LegalHealth participates in the Institute’s monthly training sessions for navigators from across the country, discussing the MLP model through “Bringing Advocacy to Your Patients with Cancer”
  – Navigation model is spreading to other patient populations, including HIV/AIDS and hepatitis

• Medicare Rights Center
  – Joint program to promote knowledge of and enrollment in Medicare Savings Programs
  – Currently working at 3 hospitals with existing LegalHealth clinics

LegalHealth’s Financial Benefit to Hospitals

• LegalHealth’s financial impact analysis program tracks the impact of LegalHealth’s work on our partner facilities, such as when a client enrolls in or maintains Medicaid.

• Over the past 3 years, LegalHealth has completed data exchanges with 7 hospitals. The financial data shows that LegalHealth’s intervention resulted in:
  – $380,000 in insurance reimbursements to Bellevue
  – $170,000 to Beth Israel
  – $217,000 to Elmhurst
  – $263,000 to Jacobi
  – $262,000 to Kings County
  – $26,000 to Mt. Sinai in 1 year
  – $419,000 to St. Luke’s
LegalHealth’s Impact on Client Health: St-Luke’s Asthma Study

• Conducted by Mary O’Sullivan, director of the chest clinics at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital
  – 21 medication-compliant asthma patients were identified
  – 11 received assistance from LegalHealth to obtain repairs to housing conditions triggering asthma, such as mold and vermin
  – The patients’ records were evaluated over the period 1 year before and 1 year after legal intervention

Asthma Study, cont’d

• For the patients who received legal intervention, the impact included:
  – Reduced emergency courses of oral steroids because of uncontrolled asthma from 18 the year before the intervention to 2 the year after the intervention
  – Reduced by 94% the need for visits to the emergency department due to asthma, from 14 prior to legal intervention vs. 2 after intervention
  – Significantly improved their asthma condition, with most patients improving by at least 1 level on the scale of seriousness of the disease