Medical-Legal Partnerships as a Tool to Teach and Address Social Determinants: MLP Operations

Natalie Castellanos, JD
Assistant Professor
Florida International University
Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine
NeighborhoodHELP Medical-Legal Partnership
Objectives

• Describe the daily operations of an MLP in an academic health center/undergraduate medical education context
• Provide concrete examples of MLP impact
NeighborhoodHELP Medical-Legal Partnership
Est. 2010

Health Partner Institution:
- Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine’s Green Family Foundation Neighborhood Health Education Learning Program ("NeighborhoodHELP")
- Students, staff, and faculty from medical, nursing, social work schools, plus community outreach team
- Total ~500-600 health partners

Law Partner Institution:
- College of Law Clinical Program
- Law school students, staff, and faculty
Background on Green Family Foundation NeighborhoodHELP™

• Population served:
  • Households in medically underserved Miami-Dade County neighborhoods
  • Approximately 600 active households

• Sites of care:
  • Household visits
  • Mobile Health Center

• Approach to care:
  • Household-centered
  • SDOH-oriented
Operating the NeighborhoodHELP MLP

Key operations:
1. Inter-professional education
2. Health partner screening for legal needs
3. Referrals to the MLP for legal consultations
4. Individualized medical-legal advocacy
5. Systemic medical-legal advocacy
Inter-professional Education

- Workshops to train health partners how to screen for legal needs
- Substantive trainings on different areas of the law
- 8-10 workshops per academic year
Screening for Health-Harming Legal Needs

- Household or Mobile Center visits
- Outreach Team conducts health risk assessments including legal
- Households that screen positive for legal needs and want legal consultation are referred to MLP
Referrals to the MLP for Legal Consultation

- Form filled out by NHELP partners, uploaded to EMR & communications portal, emailed to law clinic
- Over 1,335 health-harming legal needs referred since September 2010
- Approximately 70% of needs identified are remedied with representation, legal advice, or referral to a community resource
Referrals to the MLP by academic year (July-June)
Individualized Advocacy

In-house legal services in the following areas:

• **Health Care Access**
  – Medicaid eligibility & services
  – Social Security disability applications & appeals
  – Safety net access issues

• **Income & Employment**
  – Public benefits
  – Medical & consumer debt
  – Identity theft
  – Employment discrimination

• **Housing Stability**
  – Landlord/Tenant
  – Housing conditions
  – Utilities

• **Family Stability**
  – Domestic violence
  – Custody/time-sharing
  – Transportation

• **Immigration**
  – Naturalization
  – Replacement documents
Impact of Individualized Advocacy

• Between Sept. 2010 and Dec. 2015, individualized advocacy that often relied on collaboration with the inter-professional health partners, law students and faculty successfully secured $412,000 in direct financial benefits for the households, which included:
  – 10 approved disability claims
  – 8 cases of debt reduction (consumer, student loan, and medical)
  – 3 cases involving refunding of money owed (fraud and improper benefits reduction)
Systemic advocacy

• Ongoing systemic advocacy priorities are defined by input from the NHELP partners and analysis of legal needs referred to MLP

• Medical students work with law students in order to fulfill their capstone/community practicum requirements:
  • Community education
  • Policy advocacy
Systemic advocacy

• **Affordable Care Act Implementation:**
  • ~45% of NHELP households impacted by Medicaid expansion coverage gap
  • Community education at 20+ health fairs/enrollment events
  • 2 local meetings with Florida Legislators
  • 2 NHELP household members have spoken at public legislative meetings
  • Student trips to Tallahassee for 2013, 2014 & 2015 sessions

• **Public Hospital Oversight:**
  • Collaboration with community legal advocates
  • Policy changes:
    • Charity care for Medicaid Medically Needy
    • Extending retroactive application of charity care classification to reduce service charges
In conclusion...

Interprofessional education

Facilitates

Screening for legal needs

Generates

Referrals to MLP for legal consultations

Enables

Individualized medical-legal advocacy

Informs

Systemic advocacy

Impacts
Thank you!

• Contact:
  – Natalie Castellanos, JD
  – Email: ncastell@fiu.edu