

MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS

The Crossing Paths of Two Disciplines

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MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS (MLP)

TARGET POPULATION

MLPs target impoverished populations.

These populations lack access to the core medical and legal services they need, creating pathways through which poor health conditions arise.

HOUSING

Substandard Housing:
One of the most common problems amongst patients that bridges the gap between the legal and medical professions.

Mold infestation causing asthma is a common MLP issue resulting from terrible housing conditions, and often requires in-hospital treatment.

- Terrible housing conditions are a direct result of unlawful rights violations which have legal remedies.
- Those affected rarely seek legal reprimand against landlords due to inability to recognize when these rights can be exercised, or because they lack necessary funds to hire legal representation.
- MLPs can be implemented to advocate for vulnerable populations and establish preventative measures for the future.
- By providing MLP services in a common location, such as a hospital or medical centre, doctors and lawyers are able to spot the patient-client issues as they present themselves, and advocate for them.

Effects of MLPs on substandard housing issues:

- ✓ Enforcing legal action against nonperforming landlords, restoring lost utilities, and relocating those situated in unacceptable conditions
- ✓ Reduction in household environmental triggers such as asthma, patient health restored

PBLO AT SICKKIDS EST. 2009

The first MLP program established in Canada that bridges the gap between the medical-legal professions to address the social causes of health issues in impoverished populations

400 patients assessed through the program per year

SickKids Doctor consults with triage lawyer who provides them with advice or meets directly with the patient

Program impacts:

- Clients receive the help they need, stress relief, and increased sense of confidence and control.
- Doctors report time saved in providing appropriate assistance for their patients and improved ability to advocate for them.
- The program sees results in breadth of participation by hospital departments, types of legal issues addressed, and encourages other major centers in Canada to establish this partnership model.

Def · i · ni · tion

\,de-fə-'ni-shən \

1. The collaboration of medical and legal professionals to discover tangible solutions for patient-client problems while providing joint services in one convenient location.

2. A program employed to ameliorate the health and well-being of vulnerable populations, preventing these issues from arising in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Advocacy

Impoverished populations often do not have the proper education or foundational resources to advocate for themselves.

Doctor and lawyer ability to advocate for those they facilitate is crucial to representing reoccurring issues and inspiring change for the future.

Policy-level advocacy specifically targets the gap that exists between the government and communities that causes these medical-legal issues and expands the spectrum from support for the health of the individuals who use the MLP program to the entire population under which it operates.

Physicians and legal professionals possess the expertise and power that is required to initiate public policy improvements.

Community

MLPs can have immense power over the communities in which they operate which is significant in expanding the work of these partnerships on a broad scale, ultimately leading to growth and development.

These partnerships should adopt a community-centred approach in an effort to empower members to realize their legal rights and understand their roles as active agents of change.

This alternative approach can be accomplished through legal redress for entire families rather than patient-only service.

Learning Opportunities

The need for education is essential to the development and growth of MLPs and acting on these learning opportunities can dramatically strengthen the positive effects of these partnerships.

Training is essential for the doctors in developing their abilities to identify unmet legal needs and refer patients to the lawyer on call.

Train medical and legal students to accept interdisciplinary advocacy for patients as a natural part of their professional work, making positive contributions to the MLP initiative.

Student training can be achieved by immersing students into the community and integrating the necessary MLP training into student curricula.

MLP education should focus on:

- understanding how the law intersects with patient health;
- how to advocate on behalf of their client-patients through policy change; and
- how to properly collaborate and integrate the fields of medicine and law through case-based learning and community practicums.

BENEFITS/ISSUES

+ Benefits

75,000 patients were assisted in resolving legal issues impeding their health in 2016 alone.

- + encourages compliance with and amendment of existing laws
- + professionals expand their abilities - doctors learn how to advocate for their patients and lawyers become healers for their clients and apply the medical practice of prevention to the law
- + this inter-professional partnership offers the strength and power that drives systemic change
- + increases legal consciousness of those at the intersection of inequality
- + builds and strengthens connections with community members and draws them to the health care facilities where MLPs are located
- + implementation of legal rights in specific areas leads to community-wide housing improvements

- Issues

- while doctors are professionally trained to collaborate with their colleagues, lawyers are less apt to work in a team environment due to the profession's competitive nature
- lawyers are given little incentive to engage in inter-professional teamwork, which affects the quality of MLPs
- the medical profession is decades ahead of the legal sector in terms of prevention