



Health, Education &  
Law Project

# Faculty Disclosure

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I have no relevant financial relationship that would be considered a conflict of interest.

# What is the Health, Education & Law Project (HELP)?

- ▶ HELP is a unique partnership between Legal Aid of Nebraska and Hospitals and Federally Qualified Health Centers in Lincoln and Omaha.
- ▶ HELP attorneys eliminate legal barriers that impact patients' access to healthcare and promote better health outcomes.



# 60% of Health is Social

- ▶ Research indicates that while only 40 percent of an individual's health is determined by genetics, medical care, and personal choices, fully sixty percent of health is determined by social and environmental factors such as income, access to health care, access to enough healthy food, housing, education, job stability, and personal safety—in other words, all the things that influence an individual's well-being in the places where she is born, lives, works, and plays.



- ▶ <http://medical-legalpartnership.org/need/>

# Medical Approach Alone Not Enough

## Legal Intervention Required for Complex Social Needs

Demand for  
Multifactorial  
Intervention



### Medical Needs

Patient presents with problems that may be managed through a standard medical intervention



### Psychosocial Needs

Health and wellness impacted by psychosocial factors that require social worker, case manager support



### Legal Needs

Outcomes affected by broader socioeconomic causes that are best addressed through legal intervention



**50%**

Low to moderate income households with at least one unmet legal need

**1-3**

Average number of unmet legal needs among low-income households



### Unfulfilled Legal Needs

“Most at-risk individuals might not know when their social problems actually have legal solutions. And even if at-risk individuals realize the legal nature of their problems, they then must struggle to find legal assistance.”

*Megan Sandel, MD, MPH,  
Department of Pediatrics,  
Boston University School of Medicine*

# Why bring a lawyer into this?

Lawyers can be important to cancer patients to meet needs that go far beyond mere end of life planning

Physicians alone cannot provide the advocacy essential to a cancer survivors quality of life.

# Studies have found medical legal partnerships Improve patient quality of life

75% of patients reported reduced stress

45% reported a positive effect on their  
financial situation

30% reported enhanced treatment  
compliance

25% reported improvement in  
keeping medical  
appointments

# Health, Education & Law Project (HELP)

- ▶ Healthy and Stable Living Environment
- ▶ Resources to Meet Daily Needs
- ▶ Access to Education & Employment
- ▶ Personal Stability





- ▶ When patients meet with their health care providers and discuss problems with obtaining food, medication or housing, health care providers don't always make the connection that those problems may have legal solutions. However, failing to fix those problems can have an effect on the success of the patient's treatment outcome and overall health.

# HELP: Healthy & Stable Living Environment

- ▶ Foreclosure
- ▶ Eviction
- ▶ Substandard living conditions
- ▶ Utility shut-offs
- ▶ Deposits



# Client Stories: Housing

Tom was being evicted due to not paying his rent because he had been unable to work due to his cancer.

Tom was going to forego surgery because he would not have a place to recover.

HELP assisted Tom by negotiating an extended time for him to remain in the apartment to allow him to heal after surgery.

# Case Example:

- ▶ Diego is a child client who had recently obtained a bone marrow transplant as a result of leukemia.
- ▶ The apartment Diego and his family lived in was infested with cockroaches and bed bugs. The child could not return to these conditions with his obviously lowered immune system.
- ▶ The HELP assisted in terminating the family's lease and obtaining return of their security deposit. The HELP attorney was able to get a new apartment company to quickly process their application and the family was approved. They are now living in a bug free home. Additionally, the attorneys worked with the social workers from the hospital to obtain a donation of the families' security deposit and new beds.
- ▶ PBS News hour: <http://medical-legalpartnership.org/>

# HELP: Resources to Meet Daily Needs



## ▶ Income Maintenance

- ▶ SSI/SSDI
- ▶ Food stamps
- ▶ Veterans benefits
- ▶ Taxes

## ▶ Consumer Issues

- ▶ Bankruptcy
- ▶ Credit issues
- ▶ Debt collection/harassment
- ▶ Identity Theft

## ▶ Health & Insurance

- ▶ Medicare/Medicaid issues & appeals
- ▶ Private health insurance appeals
- ▶ Nursing home cases

# Case Example:

Sara could not afford her medication, which resulted in three hospitalizations in one year. She couldn't work because of other health impairments.

HELP attorneys intervened and helped Sara obtain disability benefits.

Sara has a steady source of income, can afford her medication and has had no more hospitalizations. The hospital benefits from avoiding the cost of unpaid hospitalizations.

# Access to Learning & Employment



## Employment

- ▶ FMLA
- ▶ Unemployment benefits
- ▶ ADA

## Education

- ▶ Discipline issues
- ▶ Special Education
- ▶ Discrimination
- ▶ Student loans

# Personal Stability



## Family Law

- ▶ Protective Orders
- ▶ Divorce
- ▶ Custody
- ▶ Child support
- ▶ Guardianship/  
Conservatorship
- ▶ Name change

## Estate

- ▶ Wills
- ▶ Powers of Attorney
- ▶ Advanced Directives



# Client Stories: Divorce

“Sharon” was not attending her chemotherapy appointments as a result of an abusive husband

HELP assisted Sharon in filing for divorce and getting a protection order.

Sharon was able to successfully complete her cancer treatment.

# Near End of Life Decisions

- ▶ When a patient is near end of life, how can HELP assist?
  - ▶ Simple Wills
  - ▶ Advice Last Wills and Advanced Directives
  - ▶ Living Wills/POA
  - ▶ Dealing with Minor children
- ▶ Extending services to spouses and significant others
  - ▶ Small Estate Affidavits

# Case Example:

- ▶ Sheila is a cancer patient who, unfortunately, was terminal. Her oldest child had just turned 19 and she wanted the family to stay together after her death. HELP was able to complete guardianship papers appointing the 19 year old as guardian of her sister. The family was allowed to stay together and the patient could pass peacefully knowing her family would be taken care of.

# How our Partnerships works:

- ▶ Hospital staff determine the patient has a social determinant need.
- ▶ Patient is referred to HELP by Social worker or other health care provider.
- ▶ HELP contacts patient and assesses their need for legal advice or representation.
- ▶ Additionally, HELP staff are on-site at the hospital four hours each week for direct patient assistance.

# National Impact of MLP On Communities and Population Health

- ▶ Each year, medical-legal partnerships engage in hundreds of projects designed to improve how clinics and policies address health-harming legal needs for entire communities
- ▶ Medical-legal partnerships save patients healthcare costs and recover cash benefits (Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved)
- ▶ Medical-legal partnerships help identify and treat substandard housing clusters



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