

Minutes of the May 13th, 2008 Meeting of NY State Coalition of Medical-Legal Partnerships

The following members were present at the meeting: Randye Retkin, Julie Brandfield, LegalHealth, New York Legal Assistance Group; Ann Hyatt, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley; Lillian Moy, Legal Aid Society of New York; David Irving, Legal Aid Society of Rochester; Steven Blatt, M.D. and Wendy Broton, R.N. Upstate Medical University; Sara Effron, Volunteers of Legal Services; Julie Hall, Manhattan Legal Services; Anne Erickson, Empire Justice Center; Joshua Cohen, UJA-Federation of NY.

The following members participated by phone: Kerry Rodabaugh, M.D., Roswell Park Cancer Institute; Peg Collins, American Lung Cancer Society, and Sarah Ramsey, Syracuse School of Law.

A. Introductions and medical-legal partnership site overviews:

Randye Retkin thanked everyone for participating in this inaugural meeting. She explained that given the growing number of medical-legal partnerships in New York State, the interest of legal and health organizations in starting such programs and LegalHealth's technical assistance grant it seemed important to work together as a group. As a way to get to know one another she asked for each person to describe their program and stage of development.

1. *Empire Justice Center* – Anne Erickson described the work of the Empire Justice Center, which provides legal services to four HIV clinics and back up legal services to other legal service offices in the region. Recently, Empire Justice received a one year grant from the NYS Health Foundation to partner with two health clinics, a FQHC and another Health Center. These clinics will provide services for health insurance coverage issues. As part of that grant, they will collect data to evaluate how their provision of legal services affects insurance coverage issues, such as Medicaid and CHIP on their partner health clinics. The results are to be reported in the spring of 2009.
2. *Manhattan Legal Services* - Julie Hall, Director of HIV Law Project, introduced their medical-legal partnership with the Ryan Community Health Center. She announced that they have just received start-up funding from Boston Medical-Legal Partnership for Children to open a site in the Ryan pediatric clinic.
3. *Syracuse Family Advocacy* - Sarah Ramsey, from Syracuse Law School, Ms. Wendy Broton, RN and Dr. Steven Blatt from Suny Upstate Medical University presented their medical-legal partnership which has been serving the pediatric clinic for the past three years. They handle a variety of legal issues such as custody, housing, immigration, and special education. They educate the physicians 3-4 times per year. The law students run the legal clinic and cases are either handled by the students or funneled to a large pro bono network. On

average the program handles about 100 cases per year. They are also in the process of building a database for their work. The program is self-funded through the medical and law school. They are considering expansion to the geriatric clinic.

4. *Help Education and Law Program (HELP) of Rochester* - David Irving, presented Rochester's medical-legal partnership that was established in 2005 and currently has clinics at the Golisano Children's Hospital and Strong Memorial Hospital. The program is funded by the Greater Rochester Health Foundation and they plan to open up another site in the pediatric clinic at Rochester General Hospital. Their current challenge is to replace their medical champion who is currently in transition due to time constraints. They also receive IOLTA funds.
5. *LegalAid Society of Northeastern NY*- Lillian Moy, Executive Director, presented their current programs that provide legal services to low income children with disabilities and people with HIV/Aids. They are in the planning stage to start a medical-legal partnership servicing Albany.
6. *Legal Services of Hudson Valley* –Ann Hyatt from Westchester also expressed their interest in starting a medical-legal partnership with White Plains Hospital, and is seeking funding opportunities.
7. *Volunteers of Legal Services*- Sarah Effron presented on the Children's Project that was established in 2001. Their program matches hospitals with law firms who run the clinics pro bono. Today, the program has expanded to 7 hospitals with sites in HIV, asthma and general pediatrics clinics. They are entering a contract with Brooklyn Legal Services to train the pro bono attorneys on the poverty law issues their clients face.
8. *Roswell Park Cancer Institute* – Kerry Rodabaugh, M.D. presented on the Legal Services Project. Their funding sources have evolved from their initial grants from the Department of Health to sustainable alliance grants with partner hospitals. Their legal partner is Neighborhood Legal Services which provides advocacy and legal services to patients on issues ranging from custody, guardianship, divorce, and benefit issues. Through 2006, the project has received approximately 170 referrals.
9. *New York American Lung Association* – Peg Collins also presented their interest in starting up medical-legal partnership.
10. *LegalHealth* – Julie Brandfield, presented on LegalHealth. She explained that since 2001, LegalHealth has grown from one site to having sites in 14 different hospitals or community health clinics. They are staff based, sending an attorney to the hospital for a legal clinic once a week. They also have a training curriculum for health care professionals. Their funding comes from the

hospitals and foundations. LegalHealth serves individuals with serious and chronic illness and has clinics in a variety of health care settings, including internal medicine, family medicine, geriatrics, pediatrics, adolescent, oncology, social work and emergency room. Last year, LegalHealth handled 3000 matters.

B. Senator Hannon's Legislation - Joshua Cohen

Josh Cohen discussed the history and process of Senator Hannon's legislation to establish medical-legal partnership within the Department of Health. The original \$2 million budget proposal was made to Governor Spitzer's office in the fall of 2007. That proposal was to fund 15 medical-legal partnerships around the state with funding for one oversight entity that would provide technical assistance. It was presented to Dennis Whalen and Joe Baker at Department of Health and received enthusiastic interest on the Governor's side. The goal was to have it be a line-item in the Governor's budget. Simultaneously, they met with Senator Hannon and Assemblyman Gottfried, chairs of Health Committee, who were also very receptive of the proposal.

When the proposal didn't make the governor's budget, Senator Hannon introduced legislation for a statewide program to be housed within Department of Health. The bill is specifically vague as to dollar amount. Currently, discussions are being had with Assemblyman Gottfried to see if he will introduce the same legislation in the Assembly.

The group discussed what efforts they can take as a whole to build momentum for the legislation. Josh suggested that grass roots advocacy may be the best. Letters can be sent to all the legislators. The Coalition should also create a statement of support and thanks to send as a whole and have as many organizations sign on to it. Some of the other organizations to bring into the efforts include:

- NY Academy of Medicine and Pediatrics
- NY Healthcare Trustees
- Community Foundation
- NYRAG
- NY Health Foundation
- United Way

For programs looking for funding opportunities for next year, the Cancer Grant is still in the budget and will be reissued March 2009.

Several members of the group questioned whether the language should be limited to individuals with chronic illnesses. A suggestion was made that the language also includes a reference to preventive health care or preventive legal care. The suggestion was well taken but everyone agreed that for this round, we should not suggest a change to the language, but raises it in the next session.

Another person queried whether it made sense to approach Judge Kaye and the judicial branch for funding support and political influence. However, one participant felt that being on the judiciary budget will lose the health overlay of the bill. Another person commented that OCA may not always be helpful.

Next steps to push legislation:

- Coalition of attorneys, doctors, and patients to write letters to Senator Hannon and health committee
- Lobbying in districts
- Strategy session in Fall 2008 with Department of Health

C. Discussion on mission of statewide medical-legal partnership network:

The following suggestions were made for goals of a statewide coalition:

- Network list serve and periodic meetings to discuss funding and best practices
- Resource to convince other legal or hospital organizations on the value of medical-legal partnerships
- Outreach to NY State Bar Association and NY State Medical Association, NY Academy of Pediatrics
- Grass roots assistance from existing champions
- To share information, studies, and case stories
- To invite guest speakers

Everyone agreed upon the name: New York State Coalition of Medical Legal Partnerships.

D. How do we communicate with each other?

- The group discussed the communication needs going forward. Several suggestions were made including using a list serve, having a web-based site for communications and using LegalHealth or MLPC websites. Everyone agreed that a list serve seemed the most important at this time. MLPC has a lot of start-up materials and programs should continue to take advantage of that site. LegalHealth may also be increasing its web-based technical assistance capabilities too.

E. New York State Bar Association Legal Assistance Partnership Conference September 2008.

A discussion was opened regarding the next meeting for the Coalition, and whether we want to try to present at the upcoming Partnership conference in September. Two members of the Partnership Conference steering committee were present, Anne Erickson and Lillian Moy. The group decided that it would seek to speak at the Project Director's meeting and at one session of the health law tract. Additionally, we will seek space to have medical-legal partners put up posters. Lastly, the group would schedule a meeting

for some time during the conference. Anne Erickson volunteered to raise these requests at the next steering committee meeting which was the following day.

Items for future meetings

- Substantive training
- How lawyers help doctors
- NY time slot at the next meeting of the Medical-legal Partnership for Children national summit
- OCA pro bono action plans
- Law school clinics

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40.