What is the Medical Legal Partnership?

- A Community Legal Aid attorney is embedded at four UMass Memorial primary care partner clinics and accepts referrals directly from medical providers.
- Community Legal Aid then works with pro bono attorneys from the private bar to serve these families.

“Many complex health-related social problems are entrenched in federal, state, and local policies and laws that require expertise in poverty law and administrative law. Using legal expertise and services, the health care system can disrupt the cycle of returning people to the unhealthy conditions that would otherwise bring them right back to the clinic or hospital. There are currently 50,000,000 Americans who face health-harming legal needs which disproportionately affect low-income families, children, the elderly, and people of color.”

-National Center for Medical Legal Partnership
The Advocacy Model

MLP Overview
Substantive Legal Areas

Case Referral
Consultation with providers
Intake

Referral packet to volunteer attorneys
Individual

Private Attorneys
Legal Aid Attorneys

Training for Volunteers and Providers

Pro Bono Project

Advocacy
Interprofessional teams: the physician-attorney relationship

- The components of the MLP are all necessary for its function
  - **Physicians** and other members of healthcare team: refer patients to Community Legal Aid (CLA)
  - **Attorneys** (CLA, Pro Bono): represent patients as clients
  - Agencies and services including Worcester Housing Authority, Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center, and the Parent Welcome Center

- How to find CLA:
  - CLA has clinical presence: a staff attorney circulates around 4 UMass clinical sites
  - CLA also has its own office in downtown Worcester

- CLA recruits Pro Bono attorneys to increase breadth of care
  - We were able to interact with these attorneys during “Pro Bono Appreciation Week”
Why should an attorney get involved?
Some examples:

Eviction
- A patient facing eviction may not know their rights, so can refer to CLA
- If the patient is aided by an attorney, they can postpone the date of their eviction for nearly 2 months (at minimum)
  - Document processing time and court dates help to push timeline

Income support
- Patients have the right to appeal government income support (disability benefits, SNAP, unemployment benefits, etc)
- An attorney can support and push forward their appeal, potentially reversing denial of these resources
Areas of Legal Intervention

**Income Maintenance**
- Disability Benefits
- Unemployment
- SNAP
- Mass Health
- EAEDC/TAFDC

**Education**
- IEP/504 Plan
- Behavior Issues
- Suspension
- Expulsion
- Language Barrier

**Housing**
- Eviction Threat
- Bad Conditions
- Public/Subsidized Housing
- Shelter
- Utilities
- Accommodations

**Guardianship & Alternatives**
- Medically Incapacitated
- Transition to Adulthood
- Healthcare Proxy
- Durable Power of Attorney
- Living Will
Does it Work?

Studies show that when legal expertise and services are used to address social needs:

- **People with chronic illnesses are admitted to the hospital less frequently.**
  - Studies showed that legal assistance targeted at improving housing conditions improved the health of asthma patients ([Journal of Asthma](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02786126.2018.1438797) and [Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1353/hcp.2017.0028)), and another study showed medical-legal partnership’s positive impact on the health of sickle cell patients ([Pediatrics](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3317831/)).

- **People more commonly take their medications as prescribed.**

- **People report less stress and experience improvements in mental health.**

- **Less money is spent on health care services for the people who would otherwise frequently go to the hospital, and use of preventative health care increases.**
  - A study showed that MLP services reduce health care spending on high-need, high-cost patients ([Health Affairs](https://content.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.16.3.105)), and a randomized control trial found families of healthy newborns increased use of preventive health care after MLP services ([Pediatrics](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3317831/)).

- **Clinical services are more frequently reimbursed by public and private payers.**
  - Medical-legal partnerships have been shown to save patients health care costs and recover cash benefits ([Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1353/hcp.2017.0028) and [Journal of Palliative Medicine](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15360382.2018.1415387)).
Needs Assessment used to identify need within patient community

Administered at three sites:

- Hahnemann Family
- Benedict Family
- Benedict Pediatrics
Needs Assessment used to identify need within patient community

Surveyed four areas of need:

- Benefits and Finances
- Personal and Family Stability
- Housing and Utilities
- Education and Employment
Zip code is an important indicator of health.

Worcester County

Great Brook Valley & Booth Apartments Area
**Worcester 01605**

Westwood Hills (Salisbury St)
**Worcester 01602**

Data from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Density Map of Zip Codes Served by our Clinics

Fun fact!
A couple patients surveyed were from as far afield as Colorado
Survey Results: Need Within the Three Clinics

Distribution of Needs

Bills and Finances: 59%
- Education and Employment: 13%
- Housing and Utilities: 17%
- Personal and Family: 11%

Sufficient Food: 14%
- Health Insurance: 11%
- Disability: 5%
- Bills: 14%
- SNAP: 8%
- Unemployment: 3%
- Other: 1%
- Transitional Aid: 3%
Survey Limitations

- Language Barriers
- Response Bias
Worcester Housing Court

- Cases we saw involved evictions, unresponsive landlords, and illegal rent hikes
- Approximately 90% of tenants are self-represented in Worcester Housing Court, as opposed to only 20% of landlords (Housing Court Department, Fiscal Year 2019 Statistics).
- There are many barriers to people who need legal support, including language barriers, cost, and things like not being able to bring your cellphone into the courthouse.
- CLA represents tenants who cannot afford a lawyer.
VIP Tour of the Housing Court

- Attorney Liz Myska, who is non-sighted, and 3 staff members took us on a guided tour of the Worcester District court from the perspective of a Visually Impaired Person (VIP)
- Students took turns being blindfolded and acting as a sighted guide while navigating the building and seeking services
  - Sighted guides were taught how to properly navigate spaces and communicate with VIPs
  - Students were blindfolded for ~45 minutes to simulate the experience of a VIP and gain a better understanding of their perspective
- Interactions also served as training for the staff at the Worcester Court House
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National Center for Medical Legal Partnership
Questions?

Medical-Legal Partnership Model

Community Health

Legal Aid  Health Care  Evaluation  Pro Bono