What Do Walmart, Texas Children's Hospital, and Pro Bono Have in Common? Understanding the Medical-Legal Partnership Model

This roundtable discussion is brought to you by the Children's Hospital Affinity Group of the In-House Counsel (In-House) and Teaching Hospitals and Academic Medical Centers (TH/AMC) Practice Groups and is co-sponsored by the AHLA Public Interest Committee.

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Availability of Legal Assistance in the U.S.

Table 6: Comparison of Private Lawyers to General Population and Legal Aid Lawyers to Low-Income Population

How Does it Work?
The MLP Network in 2013

- 134 Hospitals
- 143 Community Health Centers
- 38 Medical Schools
- 47 Residency Programs
- 107 Legal Aid Agencies
- 60 Law Firms & Corporate Law Depts
- 44 Law Schools
MLP in Arkansas – Putting the Partner in Partnership!

- For Walmart, being a good MLP partner means:
- Providing financial support to the hospital and our legal aid partner
- Providing volunteer support from Walmart attorneys and professional legal staff
- Providing directional and leadership support for the MLP; being an advocate for MLP
Arkansas MLP – Getting Started

- Arkansas Children’s was already interested in MLP.
- Walmart learned of MLP through Legal Aid of Arkansas and explored the model more through the National Center.
- With help of the National Center, Walmart assisted in bringing the right medical, legal, and community partners to the table.
- Through a series of meetings, we were able to gauge the hospital’s general needs, as well as to drill down into the specific legal issues that were causing the most concern for their patients.
Arkansas MLP – How it Works

- ACH health care team coordinates with on-site Legal Aid team to identify potential clients.
- Legal Aid team refer qualifying clients to Walmart’s Pro Bono coordinator, who assigns cases to volunteer Walmart attorneys.
- Walmart attorneys handle cases involving Medicaid benefits and services, special education, and guardianships.
- Legal Aid attorneys and disability-rights consultant provide training on legal issues and guidance on cases.
- Walmart attorneys participate on-site to do client intake screenings and provide training for health care partners.
Why Walmart and Why MLP?

- MLP model appealed to us because of its simplicity and its potential for impact.
  - No brainer – Doctors and lawyers teaming up together to tackle health issues and social stressors made perfect sense.
  - More bang for your buck – By helping resolve a legal issue, we would be helping resolve a health issue, too.

- We also wanted a structured, signature pro bono program that was unique in the corporate space.

- Our goal is to be a catalyst to bring the MLP model to children’s hospitals across the country.
MLP Core Activities

Legal Assistance

Health & Legal Institutions and Practice Transformation

Policy Change
Texas Children’s Medical-Legal-Partnership

Getting Started

• Defining the need
• Gaining institutional support to address the need
• Finding our partners
• Developing a program that best meets the needs of our patients and their families (and that can be implemented)
  o Scope
  o Cost
  o Timing
• Focusing on sustainability
Texas Children’s Medical-Legal-Partnership

*Defining the Need*

- Texas Children’s Hospital (TCH)
  - Main Campus
  - West Campus
  - Pavilion for Women
  - Health Centers (4)
- Texas Children’s Pediatrics (TCP)
  - 50 locations
  - 6 Project Medical Homes
- **More than 50% of TCH patients are covered by Medicaid**

FY12
- Admissions: 26,000
- Census days: 160,000
- Surgeries: 25,000
- EC Visits: 113,000
- Total patient encounters: 3,120,000
Texas Children’s Medical-Legal-Partnership

Gaining Institutional Support

• Case studies
  o Dying parent wants to arrange for adoption of her child by grandparents
  o Grandmother with custody of her grandson needs guardianship to enroll him in school
  o Parent needs help negotiating with landlord and utility companies to provide safe environment for child upon hospital discharge

• Commitment of resources (time, personnel, money)

• Medical-Legal-Partnership will improve the health and well-being of our patients and their families
Texas Children’s Medical-Legal-Partnership

Finding Our Partners

• Houston Bar Association / Houston Volunteer Lawyers (HVLP)
• Pro Bono partners
• Walmart
• National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership
Texas Children’s Medical-Legal-Partnership

*Developing a Program*

- On-site HVLP Staff Attorney
- Dedicated Social Worker
- 5 Sites
  - Special Needs Clinic
  - Inpatient Rehabilitation
  - Retrovirology
  - Fetal Center
  - TCP – Gulfgate (Project Medical Home)
- $250k/yr budget
Texas Children’s Medical-Legal-Partnership

*Developing a Program (continued)*

- November 2012 through May 2013
  - 60 referrals to HVLP Staff Attorney
    - 32% - Staff Attorney handled
    - 68% - Pro Bono Referrals
  - Types of Cases
    - Formalize Caregiver - 6
    - Medicaid Benefits/Denials - 3
    - Immigration - 7
    - SSI/SSDI - 3
    - Adoption - 2
    - Wills/Estates - 2
    - Employment Issues/Rights - 2
    - Landlord Tenant - 3
    - Educational Advocacy - 17
    - Guardianship - 15
Texas Children’s Medical-Legal-Partnership

*Focusing on Sustainability*

- Expand program organically, as needs/resources align
- Continuous learning and networking
  - MLP Summit
- Advocacy Trainings
  - January 30, 2013 – GUARDIANSHIP vs CUSTODY: Options for Caregivers. Additional trainings are being scheduled throughout the year
  - Future – Immigration; Educational Advocacy; Long-term Planning; Benefit Denials
Opportunities & Challenges
Other Reflections?
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