

WASHINGTON MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP

Building a Better Healthcare Team

Medical-legal partnership is a healthcare delivery model that improves the health and well-being of vulnerable populations by identifying and addressing health-harming legal needs, and removing legal barriers to better health. Washington MLP partners include Seattle Children's Hospital; Harborview Medical Center; Odessa Brown Children's Clinic; Sea Mar Community Health Centers; and the Northwest Justice Project.

A COMMUNITY HEALTH INVESTMENT



Health is a complex interplay of physical health; behavioral health; basic needs such as food, housing, education and employment; personal and family supports; welcoming communities; and quality of life—beginning at birth. Health and recovery services, without a strong foundation of equitable system supports and community services geared to sustain health, do not serve individuals as whole people.

—Washington State Health Care Innovation Plan (2013)

Good health does not begin or end inside the hospital or clinic exam room. Human needs form an intricate web that either allows a person to thrive or, when damaged or missing, keeps them from doing so. For many, basic needs such as safe housing, adequate schooling and food security are imperiled on a daily basis. Before the Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) opened its doors in 2008, doctors and nurses were often afraid to ask about a patient's personal infrastructure. If it was crumbling, they had no way to assess and act on pertinent legal rights.

"Prior to learning what MLP could do, it was just me banging my head," says Dr. Maida Chen, medical director of Seattle Children's Sleep Disorder Center. "I don't know insurance speak or legal speak and I didn't know my patients' rights or where to begin. Scott at MLP busted out a couple of phone calls and made it better."

This sentiment is echoed in success stories from social workers and nurses, medical directors and physical therapists. When they hit a wall in regard to patient advocacy, MLP offers an alternative to head-banging—access to a legal professional who knows patient and family rights, and can devise a strategy to ensure they're met.

"Once doctors send patients back out into the world, there are many things impacting their health. Doctors say their patients' health will not improve if these impacts are not addressed. That's where MLP comes in."

—Scott Crain, MLP attorney, Northwest Justice Project

In January of 2014, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation released a report from the Commission to Build a Healthier America. This national, nonpartisan group of leaders is urging the United States to "shift funding priorities to three areas essential to improving the nation's health: increasing access to early childhood development programs; revitalizing low-income neighborhoods; and **broadening the mission of healthcare providers beyond medical treatment.**"

MLP is advancing this shift by supporting providers in helping patients assert their legal rights, and targeting the root causes of health problems. Lawyers are making a difference where patient health is most vulnerable—in the communities where people live, work and go to school.



¹ Washington State Health Care Innovation Plan: http://www.hca.wa.gov/shcip/Documents/SHCIP_InnovationPlan.pdf

² *Time to Act: Investing in the Health of our Children and Communities*; full report: <http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/reports/2014/rwjf409002>.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR LONG-TERM HEALTH

Medical-Legal Partnership is founded on the idea that effective healthcare targets health problems at their source. Because legal needs significantly impact health, community well-being as a whole is more likely to see lasting improvements if these needs are addressed as an integrated part of healthcare.

The Washington MLP is the only medical-legal partnership in the Pacific Northwest—one of 97 networked partnerships across the country. Together, each year these groups provide legal intervention for more than 54,000 patients through 245 healthcare institutions. Directly and indirectly, the Washington program has helped thousands of patients and families since it began in 2008.

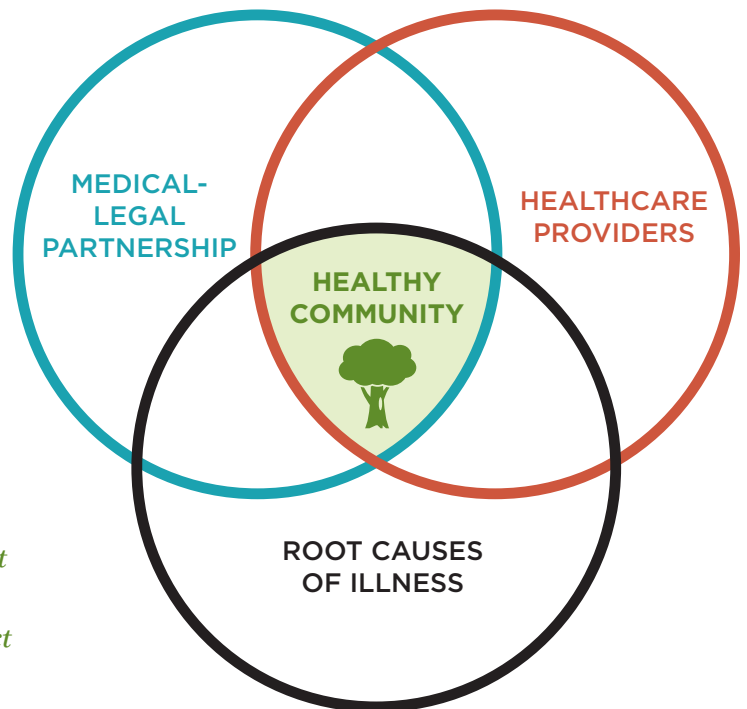
"From the beginning of developing an MLP in the Northwest we have been strategic about the need to build a solid and successful infrastructure with critical partnerships that could enable us to build on and expand services," says Carol Jenkins, co-director and founding partner of MLP; and manager, Children's Protection, Advocacy and Outreach Program. **"This vision has served us well. We have successfully branched out to serve adults as well as children, and continue to magnify our reach throughout the state."**

"Patients go to see their doctor once a year, not their attorney. The fact that we connect these two areas—law and medicine—creates a critical link for patients who don't know how to access legal help. It's a natural connection that results in healthier people."

—Scott Crain, MLP attorney, Northwest Justice Project

"My two children have asthma and were getting sick all the time from the mold in our apartment. Section 8 was going to cut us off if we moved, but the attorney negotiated with the Department of Housing and found us a new place to live, and helped us continue to get our housing voucher."

—MLP client



CHALLENGE Children's Sleep Disorder Center director requested reimbursement for sleep studies for medically complex infants. She was told repeatedly by one insurance company that they did not have sleep studies listed as a service option for infants and, therefore, they could not reimburse the study.

SOLUTION An MLP lawyer contacted the insurance company to explain the legal rights of the patient, which resulted in them adding sleep studies as a service for infants. The cost of one infant sleep study is approximately \$5,000, which would likely have come out of uncompensated care had this change not been enacted. About 15 such studies are ordered each year.

IMPACT "I would not have even known how to begin to convince the insurance company that this service is absolutely essential for these kids. This change allows staff and medical providers to use their time more effectively and saves me hours spent on the phone trying to get these studies paid for."

—Maida Chen, MD, medical director, Sleep Disorder Center, Seattle Children's

SINCE MLP WAS LAUNCHED IN 2008



2,200

INDIVIDUALS RECEIVED
DIRECT LEGAL ASSISTANCE



2,000

MEDICAL PROVIDERS,
SOCIAL WORKERS AND
OTHERS RECEIVED LEGAL
ADVOCACY TRAINING



17,000

INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES
BENEFITED FROM SYSTEM-
WIDE ADVOCACY

The Washington MLP program helps providers, patients and families in three critical areas:

- **Direct Legal Assistance**—Since 2008, more than 745 families (2,200 individuals) benefited from legal intervention to enforce basic human rights, improve health and prevent future health problems. MLP assists with housing, public benefits, education, immigration, consumer protection, family law and more. Depending on the case, MLP attorneys offer advice and counsel all the way to direct representation.
- **Medical Provider Training**—MLP lawyers have trained nearly 2,000 healthcare and other providers, including doctors, residents, social workers, nurses, law students and daycare professionals, so they are able to identify legal issues to better advocate and intervene for clients. Over the past year, MLP provided more than 200 one-on-one staff consultations. In a provider survey, **92% of respondents reported that MLP trainings substantively informed their medical practice.**
- **System-Wide Advocacy to Improve Health Services**—When a legal issue impacts a large group of patients, MLP works to bring about systemic changes. Thousands of clients statewide received services and support through MLP-won policy changes regarding health and prevention for sleep conditions, autism, disability income and more.
 - ◆ In 2012, MLP reached an agreement with the state to ensure coverage for an effective autism therapy, affecting more than 9,000 families.
 - ◆ In 2011, MLP won a lawsuit that prevented the state from terminating or reducing welfare benefits for more than 8,000 families with disabled children.

CHALLENGE A landlord arrived at Harborview to serve a vacate notice to an involuntarily detained psychiatric patient. The social worker was very concerned because of how difficult it is to secure housing with an eviction on record, and how hard it is to stay out of the hospital without a stable place to live.

SOLUTION The social worker consulted an MLP lawyer before she talked to the landlord so she would know the best way to respond, then connected the lawyer with the patient. The lawyer helped the patient come up with a timely response and action to avoid eviction, important steps to ensure this woman's long-term housing future, and help her avoid readmission to the hospital.

IMPACT "Working with MLP allowed me to focus on her emotional stress knowing that the MLP attorney supported her legal needs. MLP helps patients have a better understanding and trust of the whole legal part—they don't realize that they even have these rights. MLP is a great strategy and saves the social worker hours of time that can be more effectively spent."

—Marie Marotta, social worker, psychiatric intensive care unit, Harborview Medical Center

Each year, MLP provides legal advocacy training for 40-60 social workers, who receive free continuing education credits for their involvement.



LEAN THINKING

MLP increases provider face-to-face patient time by streamlining decision-making processes, eliminating wasted time on insurance calls, providing pre-written legal form letters and integrating services. Though cost savings are hard to measure, those who use MLP services report that working with a lawyer to help meet patient legal needs saves them hours over weeks, months or even years of trying to address legal issues by themselves.

Care Coordination

For most providers, care coordination is one of the most time-consuming parts of their job. Ana Phommachanh, RN, at Odessa Brown Children's Clinic, says she depends on MLP services.

"Care coordination is a big part of my job and it takes a lot of time to help families navigate the healthcare system. If it weren't for Scott [MLP lawyer], I'd be the one having to do the legal research," Phommachanh says. "I'm not familiar with state laws, and without him I wouldn't know how to take legal action for these families. Scott is pivotal in helping when I need assistance."

Standardizing Practice: Letter Templates

MLP provides seven letter templates that address patients' most common legal challenges. Medical professionals and families successfully use these templates to document patient needs and secure benefits related to medical necessities, housing and education. The letters save time and provide direct, effective ways to ensure patients' legal rights are being met as a foundation for improved health.

Risk Management

David Stallings, Children's director of Risk Management, says MLP plays an important role in helping families with guardianship. When children with complex medical needs reach adulthood, parents or other guardians are faced with difficult decisions. If the child has intellectual barriers that make healthcare decisions challenging, it's important to secure a legal guardian so the hospital can avoid time-consuming consent procedures related to determining mental capacity.

"MLP's ability to obtain guardianship orders streamlines the process for the family and for us. If a guardian has not been appointed, we have to use the alternative surrogate decision-maker process, which takes a lot of extra staff time when they could be caring for other patients," Stallings says. "Access and time are key to our goal of providing the best service possible in an expedient manner. MLP provides an incredibly valuable service to families, but it benefits the hospital as well—we're very lucky to have them."



"The school cut off line-of-sight nursing care for my son and would not listen to me when I told them this level of care was necessary for his chronic condition. The attorney helped me communicate with the school and they agreed to re-instate the care. He empowered me to help other families so I have started a blog to help them understand school and medical regulations for tracheotomy-dependent children."

—MLP client



CHALLENGE Though accepted as a leading therapy for autism across the nation, Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) was not covered by insurance.

SOLUTION In 2013, an MLP lawyer helped mediate a process that led to 9,000 Medicaid families gaining coverage formerly unavailable for this type of therapy. The therapy costs around \$40,000 per child each year. (60% of MLP families served earn less than \$19,000 per year.)

IMPACT "There is mounting evidence that intensive ABA therapy for children with autism improves outcomes in terms of severity—and the earlier and more intensive it is, the less severe the symptomology. MLP has been very effective at solving broader advocacy legal issues like this one, and addressing personal issues important to the well-being of children and their families—and you need to do both. Medical providers need legal partners to help us solve these issues."

—Chuck Cowan, medical director, Autism Center, Seattle Children's

CHALLENGE Residents lack experience with and knowledge of social issues that affect health.

SOLUTION MLP lawyers provide advocacy training for 32 residents per year/two hours per training.

IMPACT “I thought for the past year while working at the public health clinic that I understood and related well to my patients. I was wrong...I was missing food insecurity, homelessness, substandard housing conditions, utility access, immigration issues and domestic violence. By asking these tough questions and learning about the most pressing issues in their lives, I connected with the families of my patients for the first time. I undoubtedly provided better and more meaningful healthcare because of this and cannot imagine how I practiced pediatrics without including these fundamental aspects of my patients’ health.”

—Abigail Grant, MD, a resident who received training from a Washington MLP attorney



Integrated Care

MLP promotes a collaborative approach to healthcare that moves away from a fragmented delivery system. This shifts the culture of healthcare from reactive to preventative, aiming to address the root causes of illness. Ben Danielson, director of Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic, believes that breaking down barriers between services is key to more effective, holistic healthcare.

“We’re pulling ourselves out of individualized buckets and integrating care. A big part of that is patient-centered care coordination and care throughput—care that is well-informed by the family with a preventative focus so we can be less wasteful by responding to things earlier,” Danielson says. “MLP trainings for medical and law school students build bridges that are helping to achieve not just a professional de-siloing, but an educational de-siloing. MLP plays an important role in this new way of delivering care.”

More Efficient Care

Brian Johnston, chief of Pediatrics at Harborview Medical Center, and co-director and founding member of Washington MLP, believes access to legal services helps clinicians and social workers do their jobs better.

“Having an attorney in our back pocket makes a huge difference because we can ask questions about the social circumstances under which our kids and their families are living, and we can actually act on the answers,” Johnston says. “This makes everybody’s job easier because social determinants of health are the elephant in the room in a clinic like ours where people are poor and don’t have the resources, time or wherewithal to advocate for themselves. While we’ve always known at some level that these factors are influencing health outcomes, we have not always been able to do anything about them. With MLP, we can recognize them, ask the right questions and begin to address them.”

BEFORE MLP*



AFTER MLP*



**This graphic portrays widespread provider feedback about how MLP has freed up their time by managing patient legal needs.*

CHALLENGE A 17-year-old moderately autistic patient needed transitional planning for after high-school education. After struggling with an unresponsive school system for more than a year, the provider turned to MLP.

SOLUTION An MLP lawyer filed a Special Education Citizen Complaint with the Superintendent of Public Instruction and procured the needed services for this student.

Since this intervention, providers have been able to refer other families directly to the state office, where they can effectively argue their own cases, freeing up time for other patients.

IMPACT “I almost gave up because I was getting nowhere. It takes a lot of time and effort to learn the laws and rights of patients. The MLP lawyer spells it out and gives us those tools, and helps us help families much more effectively so we’re not wasting a lot of time chasing things.”

—Andrea Valdez, ARNP, family psychiatric nurse practitioner at Children’s Autism Center, Seattle Children’s



“We spent 13 months in the hospital after our son was born with a very serious condition. When we finally came home, we were denied in-home nursing care and I had to quit my job to stay home with my son. We also had a pile of medical bills. Because of the language barrier, we were not able to get this resolved. The attorney negotiated for us out of court, and our son now has SSI benefits as well as some in-home care. It is a big relief because now he is getting the care he needs.”

—MLP client



CHALLENGE An immigrant mother feared for her life and her children’s lives, and fled a traumatic domestic abuse situation in another state, arriving in Washington with severe depression and no resources.

SOLUTION The Sea Mar social worker and MLP lawyer worked together to address both the woman’s pressing mental health and social needs. The lawyer helped the mother obtain a work visa so she was able to support herself and her family, something she could not do before.

IMPACT “It’s not even measurable how helpful it can be to give a patient access to someone who knows how to work with folks living with a mental illness, and speak to them about complex legal processes in a way they can understand. I’m not an attorney and I can’t provide legal advice. This is so important.”

—Mayra Sanchez, social worker, maternal child behavioral health coordinator, Sea Mar Community Health Centers

Q&A WITH DR. BEN DANIELSON

The director of Odessa Brown Children's Clinic, and co-director and founding partner of MLP, reports that the majority of his patients have benefited from MLP services at some point in their medical care.

As a primary care physician, how does MLP help you do your job better?

I have learned a whole set of pragmatic advocacy skills through MLP. I have always wanted to help patients and families, and in the past I was passionate but not accurate, and not effective much of the time. It's great to have passion, but it's so much better when that's coupled with skills—MLP has really helped me be more efficient and effective.

What specific skills have you learned?

I now know how to write an effective letter to a landlord, how to complete paperwork and to speak to people who are in a position of decision-making in organizations and state agencies. It's really important because providers spend a lot of time doing paperwork and coordinating care, and that limits the amount of face-to-face time we spend with patients. When I'm not doing direct patient care, it's almost as if the money is siphoning out of the organization.

What do hospital donors think about MLP?

Donors are concerned about wrap-around care. More and more often they are asking what we're doing to prevent illness, to manage chronic diseases more effectively, and how we're looking at the whole child's life, not just the comparative micro-minutes that they actually spend in the hospital. This is what MLP helps us do, and it has a return on investment that's very substantial, albeit difficult to measure.

How does MLP fit into how healthcare delivery is viewed by the greater community?

We know very well that we can't just wait for people to get sick. That is not moving the society forward or impacting the nature or burden of illness, which is what so many people who work in great institutions like this want to do.

Healthcare organizations have roots in dedication and obligation to communities. This means preparing physicians with the tools they need to provide good advocacy. This comes from places like MLP.

To me it's more of a surprise that there was a time before 2008—before MLP existed—because now it's inserted itself into the DNA for many of the people who work here and into many of the operational components of care.



Ben Danielson accepts a generous donation to MLP from Vicki Gleeson representing the RealNetworks Foundation—a long-time supporter—with Annette Quayle, MLP coordinator (r).

Can you talk about how MLP affects healthcare outcomes?

The future of healthcare will be much more outcomes based. Some of these outcomes are what families feel is helpful to them, and some of them involve moving the ball on chronic disease measures. MLP impacts chronic disease measures. Patients are much better able to manage their asthma in a healthy way when their other issues have been dealt with. People can dedicate their resources towards medication management and not missing appointments when we've helped them with transportation and housing—the kinds of issues that MLP deals with. So, care throughput, whether you're measuring no-shows, or changes in spirometry values in a child with asthma, actually has a relationship to the effectiveness of the care I'm able to provide—thanks to MLP.

How does MLP empower your patient families?

Time and time again, what I've learned in my practice is that being good at things like major medical decision-making is important, but much more of the time I'm most effective when I can help with two or three very small things. When I do this, patients are empowered and able to manage some of the bigger things themselves. There is no single program I can think of that better imbues the skills and the mindset and the tangible resources of advocacy than MLP.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

In addition to addressing unmet, health-harming legal needs, studies in Illinois, New York and Atlanta have shown that **MLP services realize a net return on investment** for healthcare organizations that offer clients legal coverage.

Washington MLP has also realized measurable gains for families facing daunting health challenges:

Since 2008, Washington MLP has helped secure **\$561,000*** in state funds for 21 patient families in need of long-term personal care (nursing, etc.), so people with disabilities can live safely in the community.

In the same timeframe, MLP has worked to ensure the rights of eligible patient families, obtaining a total of **\$154,700*** in temporary assistance, food assistance and social security benefits.

MLP filed a lawsuit in 2011 to stop the state from cutting financial assistance used by nearly 8,000 low-income families to support their children with disabilities. The lawsuit preserved approximately **\$30 million** in assistance that would have otherwise been lost.

**Total includes one year of benefits; typically benefits last much longer.*

HEALTHCARE VS. SICKNESS CARE

It is increasingly clear that most of what we call health doesn't come from a doctor or clinic. If the goal is to promote health across the population, there's a limit to what physicians, nurses or social workers can do. Health outcomes are driven by where people live; their income level; the schools they go to; their family structure; and their access to groceries, playgrounds and parks.

"If we're calling ourselves a healthcare system and not a sickness care system, then it's incumbent upon us to ask how we can reach beyond the clinic walls and go upstream to where our patients live, and look at the sources of health disparities," says Dr. Johnston. "Most of the things that are making our patients sick or keeping them well are not directly under our control. We can assess and address some of those by bringing lawyers into the care mix."

Through the work of MLP, Seattle Children's, UW Medicine Harborview Medical Center, Sea Mar Community Health Centers and Northwest Justice

Project have focused attention on helping patients address the social issues that are proving to be so essential to achieving lasting health. Our challenge is that these services cannot continue without sustainable funding sources.



Advocate for a Healthier Tomorrow

We have the opportunity to leverage these achievements to create a robust, sustainable MLP program—a national model that serves our community by meeting foundational health needs of vulnerable children and adults while reducing medical costs. To do this, MLP needs your support. Ongoing investment is needed to sustain operational support for this program.



JOIN US

We invite you to partner with us to launch a legacy of integrated, holistic healthcare. With your help, MLP will continue to build a better healthcare team. Thank you.

To learn more about the Washington Medical-Legal Partnership, contact Annette Quayle at 206.987.5942 or annette.quayle@seattlechildrens.org. www.washingtonmlp.org