An Innovative Vehicle to Address the Institute of Medicine’s Six Aims for Improvement: The Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP)

Sylvia Caley, JD, MBA, RN; Lisa R. Bliss, JD; Robert Pettignano, MD, FAAP, FCCM, MBA

Introduction
The Institute of Medicine (IOM) in its landmark publication, Crossing the Quality Chasm, emphasized that the overarching purpose of healthcare organizations is to reduce the burden of illness, injury, and disability, and to improve the health status and function of people. To fulfill this threshold purpose six aims for improvement are recommended.

Description
The Health Law Partnership (HeLP) is an innovative medical-legal partnership and community collaboration that serves low-income and minority children by addressing the social, environmental, and economic factors that adversely impact their health and well-being. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, the Atlanta Legal Aid Society, and Georgia State University College of Law created HeLP to improve the health and social well-being of low-income children and their families seeking care within the Children’s system.

Objective
We examined how combining the health care expertise of hospital professionals with the legal expertise of attorneys through a medical-legal partnership to provide an interdisciplinary and holistic set of services addressed the multiple determinants of children's health as they relate to the 6 aims for improvement.

What we found:
- **Effectiveness**: use of medical evidence to prove cases; education to facilitate identification of patient/family legal issues; documenting in the EHR as a means of screening, referral, ensuring processing and that assistance progressing.
- **Safety**: assist in protection from domestic violence, child abuse and delays in discharge that could lead to iatrogenic injury; appeal of denial for medically necessary treatments or equipment that permit the safe management of a patient’s condition.
- **Timely**: reduce delays in the delivery of care by attending to legal issues that prevent access to care or delay discharge increasing length of stay and the potential for hospital acquired infections or errors.
- **Patient Centeredness**: addressing issues of social justice, diversity, and culture through the legal check-up; developing long term relationships especially in those with chronic illness that may have more challenges with legal solutions.
- **Efficiency**: through cooperation, coordination, collaboration with other members of the healthcare team; education of families about common legal problems and how they may prevent and/or address them as they arise.
- **Quality**: Specially trained MLP lawyers to address health disparities, access to care challenges, and treating individuals fairly.

Conclusions
MLPs:
- Address the aims set forth by the IOM
- Focus on Patient Centeredness using a holistic and interdisciplinary approach
- Demonstrate that effective problem solving saves time and resources
- Are a model for collaboration and coordination of healthcare services
- Contribute positively to system performance and outcome
- Expand the armamentarium of the healthcare team and benefits patients

Background
Medical-legal partnerships (MLPs) are inter-professional community collaborations between medicine and law that offer an interdisciplinary approach to patient service and institutional improvement. Given the mission of MLPs to provide collaborative, holistic services to address patient needs, of the 6 aims, patient centeredness, efficiency, and equity of care are high priorities.

Medical-legal partnerships assist patients and families in navigating complex benefits systems.

Sources
- Bliss L, Caley S, Pettignano R. Bridging the Quality Gap: Medical-Legal Partnerships Contribute to Patient Care Excellence. (Accepted for publication, May 2014, Physician Executive Journal of Medical Management)