

# New partnership addresses social determinants of health

When someone is sick, they go to a doctor hoping to get well. But sometimes, the path to good health requires more than a medical solution, it needs a legal one too.

This is the basis for a new medical-legal partnership between Summa Family Medicine Center and Community Legal Aid. Medical-legal partnerships, commonly called MLPs, combine the expertise of healthcare providers and legal advocates to address underlying social issues that contribute to poor health outcomes.

Shannon Perkins, Ph.D., director of Behavioral Science/Associate Director, Summa Family Medicine Residency Program highlighted the value of the collaboration.

“The new medical-legal partnership between Summa Family Medicine Center and Community Legal Aid will allow us to help our patients with ‘health-harming legal needs,’ like eviction, unsafe housing, and domestic violence. Medical-legal partnerships are a proven way to positively impact the physical and mental health of families struggling with poverty,” shared Perkins.

The partnership, which launched last month, was made possible by a \$50,000 grant from Summa Women’s Health Philanthropy Circle.

“We are grateful for the generosity of the Summa Women’s Health Philanthropy Circle, which has allowed us to launch this program, and we hope this is the beginning of a long-term sustainable partnership,” Perkins said.

Marie Curry, managing attorney for the Health, Education, Advocacy, and Law (HEAL) project at Community Legal Aid, coordinates the necessary legal services when a patient is referred. These services can be a lifeline for clients who may not have realized that there are legal solutions to the problems that are contributing to their health challenges.

“Good healthcare requires medical professionals and other advocates to address any underlying issues that are barriers to good health,” she explained, “like getting a landlord to fix mold in an apartment so an asthmatic child can breathe easier.”

Curry noted that advocates conduct a holistic screening when a client is referred, since there may be multiple services that Legal Aid can provide.

“Having an attorney by your side can make all the difference when it comes to resolving problems that create or contribute to poor health,” stressed Curry. “When these issues are corrected, everybody wins.”

Curry explained that while medical-legal partnerships help patients by improving health outcomes, they also benefit insurance providers by lowering the overall cost of care.

Patients of the Summa Family Medicine Center are encouraged to speak with their healthcare provider to see if Legal Aid can help them.

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