

Just Dealings

THE OHIO LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

INNOVATIVE MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS REMOVE BARRIERS TO HEALTHCARE AND JUSTICE

Ohio's legal aid programs are among those leading the country in developing a new service model designed to radically change healthcare for children in low income families. By partnering doctors with lawyers, these programs address the factors that contribute to and exacerbate the health problems of poor children.

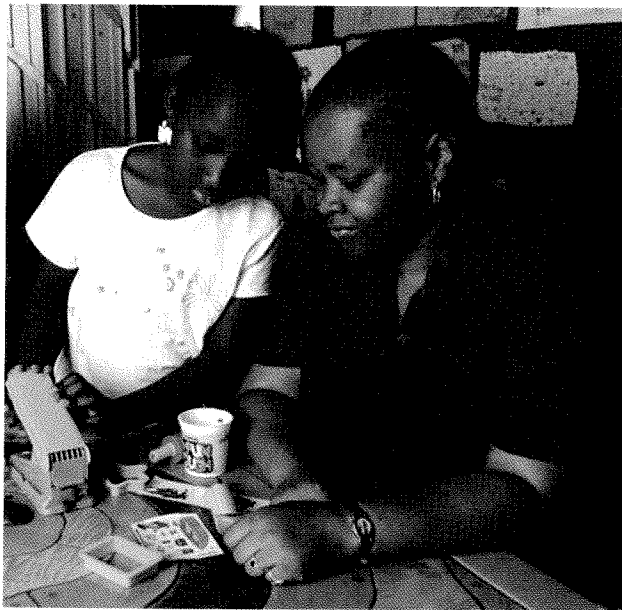
Pediatricians now recognize that lawyers and healthcare professionals working together can often prevent illness and can give sick kids a better shot at recovery because they can address the full continuum of children's needs, including housing, food, education, health care and a safe, stable environment. Documented medical information and medical testimony provide powerful evidence and persuasive advocacy for lawyers representing the interests of children in a wide variety of legal issues, including habitability issues involving mold and lead paint abatement; access to health care and children's SSI; access to food stamps; and education law issues. This model of service delivery, known as the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) model, was first developed in 1993 at Boston Medical Center and has been replicated in 30 other regions of the country.

In Ohio, two legal aid society programs have developed medical-legal projects using the FAP model. Others are in preliminary planning stages. The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland launched the Community

Advocacy Program (CAP) with a Skadden Fellow in 2002 in collaboration with the MetroHealth Medical Center. MetroHealth, a 731-bed safety-net teaching hospital with nine community health centers, provides healthcare to any resident of the City of Cleveland/Cuyahoga County regardless of ability to pay.

The CAP is in the process of expanding with a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which has awarded MetroHealth a four-year \$500,000 Local Initiative Funding Partners (LIFP) matching grant. Local corporations and foundations have agreed to match the grant amount, achieving a total of \$1.27 million in funds, which will enable CAP to place attorneys in smaller outpatient hospitals located in city neighborhoods throughout Cleveland. In

doing so, CAP intends to reach new populations by working with gerontologists on elder law issues and Spanish-speaking doctors to reach clients in the Hispanic community. Persons reentering society from prisons will also be targeted.

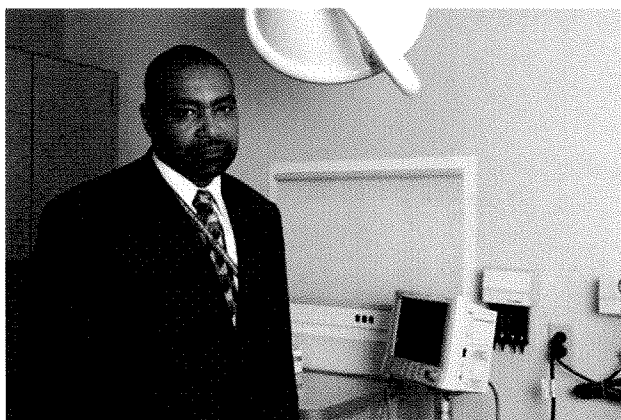


Mother and daughter (above) have greatly benefitted from Cleveland's MetroHealth Family Advocacy Program.

INNOVATIVE MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS REMOVE BARRIERS TO HEALTHCARE AND JUSTICE (Continued)

Continued from page 1

CAP's goals include: removing legal barriers to healthcare and improving healthcare outcomes by providing direct legal services to low-income patients at three Center for Community Health (CCH) sites; educating multi-disciplinary teams of healthcare providers



Harry Walker, M.D., Director, MetroHealth Center for Community Health in Cleveland, Ohio.

and health professional students about their patients' legal rights; developing a reentry clinic at MetroHealth to meet the healthcare needs of formerly incarcerated persons returning to the communities surrounding the CCH sites; and engaging in regional policy development and advocacy to improve health by drawing informed attention to issues identified through trends in patient advocacy.

With additional resources, a pediatric attorney will assume responsibilities at the Broadway and Buckeye CCH sites in the Fall of 2006; a bilingual attorney will join the McCafferty CCH site in the Fall of 2007; an elder law attorney will work at Broadway and Buckeye CCH sites in the Fall of 2008; CAP staff will develop and open a reentry clinic at the Broadway CCH site in the Summer of 2007; law student interns will assist the attorneys and facility staff throughout.

Local funding partners for CAP include Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff, LLP; Eva L. and Joseph M. Bruening Foundation; Calfee, Halter & Griswold, LLP; The Callahan Foundation; The Cleveland Foundation; The George Gund Foundation; RPM International; Saint Luke's Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio; Thompson Hine LLP; and United Black Fund of Greater Cleveland.

The legal aid organizations in Toledo are replicating the successful CAP model in Cleveland with the Medical/Legal Project (MLP). Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE) and Legal Aid of Western Ohio (LAWO) are partnering with St. Vincent Mercy Medical Center, Mercy Children's Hospital (MCH) and its affiliate, Medical University of Ohio Department of Pediatrics (MUO). The president of Toledo Children's Hospital recently joined the collaborative, which has representatives from legal, medical, and mental health entities. ABLE has been awarded \$237,220 from the d'Youville Foundation for a two-year period to fund one attorney in the first year and an additional attorney in the second year. ABLE also is assigning two AmeriCorps attorneys to the program. They will assist in orientation and cross-training of healthcare staff and attorneys.

A crucial step in instituting the MLP is providing physicians, residents, interns, nurses, and social workers with the resources, tools, strategies, and support to make it possible for them to screen patients for legal problems and proactively assess social/environmental determinants of their health and welfare. Healthcare providers will receive training regarding advocacy strategies and resources so they and the participating lawyers can be comfortable working collaboratively with each other.

LAWO will begin providing services at the St. Vincent Mercy Family Care Center in late 2006. Every year, the Center provides primary care for 7,000 children and adolescents; 91 percent of those patients receive Medicaid and most are from minority populations. More than 60 percent of the children live with single mothers and 80 percent of the families live in poverty. This comprises the very population that the MLP will target.

Learn more about each of these medical-legal partnerships and their sponsor program by visiting each website:

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland:
www.lasclev.org

**Advocates for Basic Legal Equality/
Legal Aid of Western Ohio:**
www.lawolaw.org