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New AMA Backing of Medical-Legal Partnerships Wins ABA Praise

ABA President Carolyn B. Lamm

Today’s action by the AMA on medical-legal partnerships promises to advance an important and creative method for solving the problems of a struggling family or individual. The asthmatic child, disabled veteran and elderly widow are just a few examples of those whose lives can be positively changed when lawyers and doctors work hand in hand to address interrelated legal and medical problems.

Medical-legal partnerships combine physicians, health care providers, social workers and lawyers into an interdisciplinary team that can proactively address unmet social and legal needs. The medical issues for which people seek a doctor’s care often relate to underlying issues that may need the attention of legal counsel. For example, a medical-legal partnership gives the child with asthma who returns to a roach-infested apartment an advocate who can take legal steps to transform the home into a healthier environment. Integrating free legal services into programs available at hospitals and health centers is an effective way to identify those in crisis and get them the help they need to heal, and put their lives back together.

Those who have adopted medical-legal partnerships report that these projects relieve suffering and let people get back on their feet as productive members of society. The attorneys who work in such partnerships on a pro bono basis deserve high praise and we encourage more lawyers to pursue similar, pro bono work. It also is critical that Legal Services Corporation gain additional resources so their grantees can expand partnership efforts.
The ABA is a strong advocate for these collaborations and is delighted to have the partnership of the AMA in this regard.
