

The Medical-Legal Partnership

The Medical-Legal Partnership is a collaboration between Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center, the Center for Children's Advocacy, Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Charter Oak Health Center, Community Health Services, Inc., and The Hospital of Central Connecticut.

Building a Bridge to a More Meaningful Life

Felicia Harris knows what it is like to gain a powerful voice on behalf of her 10-year-old daughter Tamia. When Felicia sought care for her daughter, who suffers from cerebral palsy, she found numerous challenges. Felicia remembers talking with a pediatrician at Saint Francis, Fred Bogin, M.D., about her frustrations and the feeling of relief when she learned that there might be help from a "team" that understood the medical, social and legal needs of her family. This help couldn't be more needed for Felicia whose 16-year-old son, Quandale, has autism. Felicia says she depended on the Saint Francis Pediatric Department to guide her through the huge task of finding the right resources.

You might wonder how medically informed "legal" help could be a benefit for Felicia's family? The answer: At the most basic level. Tamia loves to be with people at school and has numerous appointments to attend. The front of their apartment, however, has several steps to negotiate every time they leave home. This became a major problem. Felicia shares, "I had to work real hard to get the wheelchair to the ground. And this was an issue several times each day. It was so difficult getting her to appointments and to school and back."

Dr. Bogin referred Felicia to the Medical-Legal Partnership, a venture led under the leadership of Jay Sicklick, an attorney specializing in this unique area of healthcare. Jay assessed the need for legal advocacy to get a ramp made for the Harris family home that would supply much-needed relief and hope. Felicia remembers, "After all the red tape, he was able to pull together results in a single month." Tamia, who

cannot speak, remembers the day the ramp was installed with a smile. But the relief is most apparent in her mom whose life, so filled with care for her children, is more hopeful. The ramp liberates Felicia from the physically straining and dangerous task of leaving her house with her daughter, and provides her with a little care of her own.

Like so many Community Benefit activities, this one, too, is led by an individual with personal insight and passion for providing service to others. Jay Sicklick says, "My wife is a physician and my father was a physician at Saint Francis for many years." Jay's professional roots are in public interest law. This is the kind of law that helps people where they live.

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Felicia Harris

Did You Know?

Hartford has the second highest child poverty rate in the nation among cities with a population exceeding 100,000. Minority groups are especially vulnerable as they experience disparities in access to healthcare, language or cultural barriers, and are more likely to be poor.¹

1. Center for Children's Advocacy Brochure, University of Connecticut, School of Law.



Jay Sicklick is an attorney specializing in empowering families when medically informed legal assistance can assure the most optimal healing outcome.

Contact:

Jay E. Sicklick, Esq., Director
Medical-Legal Partnership Project
(860) 714-1412
jsicklick@kidscounsel.org
www.kidscounsel.org

Jay notes, “I found it satisfying to build from the ground up, take on a unique challenge – and there were few models addressing this area.” Though it is seen in legal circles as ‘less glamorous,’ it finds a comfortable home in a mission-focused healthcare setting.

The idea of a multi-disciplinary team seemed fascinating to Jay. “You are not only doing legal representation work,” Jay states, “but you are creating a new culture within the community you are working in. You actually change the way care is provided. It’s not ‘you have a problem so go to a lawyer next door’, it’s more we are ALL investigating answers as part of a healthcare team.”

This program, Jay explains, allows focus on the “health and well-being of a person” not merely their legal rights. In this way, the culture of how law and medicine are accessed and practiced seems to be changing.

Like any mother, Felicia wants the best for her children and she is grateful that Community Benefit activities at Saint Francis include meeting the unique medical, social and legal needs of her family, right on her own front steps. The story of the Harris family reminds us of the importance of culture change in professional fields, like medicine and law, to meet the specialized needs of our community.

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Jay Sicklick, Esq.

Stories

