

Yale-New Haven Hospital and Center for Children's Advocacy Join to Open New Medical-Legal Partnership Office

Yale-New Haven Hospital has partnered with the Center for Children's Advocacy, a statewide nonprofit that protects the legal rights of children who suffer from abuse, neglect or lack of access to critical services, to open the doors to its new Medical- Legal Partnership office on site at Yale-New Haven Hospital.

"We're delighted to team up with the Center for Children's Advocacy to assist some of our most vulnerable patients and their families," said William J. Aseltyne, General Counsel and Senior Vice President, Legal Services at Yale New Haven Health System.

"Yale-New Haven has an outstanding commitment to children's health and well-being that enables this partnership to help the most at-risk patients and families in the New Haven area," said Jay Sicklick, Deputy Director of the Center for Children's Advocacy and director of the Center's Medical-Legal Partnership Project. "Working together, we will improve health outcomes for individual children and address systemic issues that relate to children's health."

Attorney Alice Rosenthal, a native of New Haven, is the new Medical-Legal Partnership attorney on-site at the hospital and brings extensive public service legal expertise on behalf of vulnerable children and families to this partnership.

"There are so many families whose children suffer from medical issues that can be alleviated with our help," said Rosenthal. "Poverty should not be a roadblock to the health and wellbeing of children and families. Our new office on site at the hospital gives patients and practitioners easy access to legal services that can provide real relief to families."

Medical-Legal Partnerships throughout the country provide tangible relief to families who live in poverty. The new venture at Yale-New Haven Hospital is the Center for Children's Advocacy's fifth location in Connecticut. Other MLPP offices are on site at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, St. Francis Hospital & Medical Center, The Hospital of Central Connecticut and the Hartford's Charter Oak Health Center.

Since opening the first Connecticut office in 2000, the Center for Children's Advocacy's MLPP has worked with its healthcare partners to help thousands of children and their families. Common concerns the partnership helps resolve are housing issues, mental health screening, disability and basic needs benefits, utility issues, employment law, Medicaid and HUSKY concerns, and (special) education rights.

The Center's MLPP also works with its healthcare partners to address systemic issues that affect children's health, and provides support to the state's healthcare teams to enhance patient and family advocacy.

Community Benefit

During her daughter's recent checkup, a mother mentioned that her landlord is evicting the family because she'd complained about crumbling walls in their apartment. The pediatrician knows that unsanitary conditions can adversely affect a child's health, but was not sure what to do about the patient's housing situation.

Ada Fenick, MD, MLPP medical site director and acting director of the Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital Pediatric Primary Care Center, is very enthusiastic about the new collaboration. "This is a much needed service for patients, many of whom face challenges we are not equipped to deal with as physicians."

Here are some examples of the children who have recently been helped by the Medical-Legal Partnership:

- A child with muscular dystrophy who was denied children's disability benefits. Working with the child's physician, the MLPP attorney submitted medical documentation and analysis of the child's eligibility for children's disability. She represented the mother at the appeals hearing, helped the family get assistance from a community organization, and secured necessary supports from the school system, including a wheel chair for in-school use.
- A boy with severe autism whose family felt he needed additional services. The MLPP attorney advocated for the child with his school system and partnered with the Connecticut Department of Development Services to ensure that the child received all the educational and behavioral supports that needed to be successful in school.
- Families facing the crisis of utility termination. The MLPP and its medical partners have developed a curriculum to educate families about programs offered by the State and by utility companies to protect household utility service. The law protects certain families from utility termination, and the MLPP offers clinics to help families understand their responsibilities and opportunities.
- A young girl with asthma whose unhealthy housing conditions – mold, pest infestation and poor ventilation – were causing life-threatening attacks. Working with the pediatric primary care provider, the MLPP attorney contacted the city on behalf of this family and was able to help them secure affordable housing that is clean and safe. She was also successful in getting the landlord to return the family's security deposit, which he had threatened to keep if they moved out.

In addition to working with New Haven families, Rosenthal and other MLPP staff will conduct trainings with Yale-New Haven Hospital physicians, other healthcare providers and social service staff on legal issues affecting children's health.

“Doctors and other healthcare providers play an essential role in the lives of their patients,” says Rosenthal. “Our job is to work with them to improve health outcomes for the families seen by Yale-New Haven Hospital.” Contact MLPP Attorney Alice Rosenthal at arosenthal@kidscounsel.org or 203-688-0113.

The Center's Medical-Legal Partnership at Yale-New Haven Hospital is funded by the hospital, a generous grant from the law firm of Wiggin and Dana and additional philanthropic support from the community.

For more information about the Center for Children's Advocacy Medical-Legal Partnership Project, visit www.kidscounsel.org/mlpp.

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