



Yale-New Haven joins legal partnership for children's advocacy

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Children in Yale-New Haven Hospital now have access to better legal support through a new partnership for children's advocacy.

The Center for Children's Advocacy, a nonprofit that works to promote the legal rights of vulnerable children in Connecticut, and Yale-New Haven Hospital formed a new Medical-Legal Partnership in June. The collaborative aims to improve the health outcomes of children from low-income backgrounds through on-site legal intervention, such as improving housing conditions, protecting educational rights or providing access to appropriate services for disabilities.

"In order to impact the medical problems, the legal issues have to be taken care of," said Bonnie Roswig, the senior staff attorney of the Center for Children's Advocacy's Medical-Legal Partnership Project. She added that regardless of the medicine doctors prescribe for sick children, some problems cannot be fixed because of the environments in which children live.

Among the program's targets are children who suffer from preventable conditions, such as asthma and skin problems, that arise because of poor housing conditions. In one instance, a doctor discovered that a child who suffered from asthma and epileptic seizures was living in a house with bed bugs that could exacerbate the diseases. The program helped the child's family move to a clean apartment, according to Alice Rosenthal, the attorney who works on-site at the hospital. She added that the child has also benefited from special education services with the help of the program.

"[The families] are so excited to talk to a lawyer who is right at the hospital," said Rosenthal.

In addition to direct outreach to New Haven residents, project staff members will lead training sessions with faculty at Yale-New Haven and other healthcare providers about the legal issues that affect children's health.

The idea of bringing a medical-legal partnership to Yale-New Haven was first brought up eight years ago by a Yale Law School student who was studying medicine at Stanford, said Ada Fenick, the associate director of Yale-New Haven's Pediatric Primary Care Center and medical site director of the project. Fenick started looking for more supporters and took steps to implement the student's idea, and the project finally started in New Haven earlier this summer.

Medical-legal partnerships have gained momentum throughout the country over the last decade after first launching in Boston. The Center for Children's Advocacy expanded the collaborative to Hartford's Connecticut Children's Medical Center in 2000. There are currently over 180 medical-legal collaboratives operating throughout the nation.

The project's "ultimate mission" is the improvement of health outcomes on an individual basis as well as systematically throughout an entire area, said Jay Sicklick, the deputy director of the Center for Children's Advocacy.

cy and director of the Center's MLPP. The multidisciplinary nature of the collaboration allows the organization to approach specific issues through means such as faculty training at hospitals while also working toward the implementation of better policies statewide.

Though the Yale branch of the project will operate out of Yale-New Haven, the Center for Children's Advocacy also offers services throughout the state in schools, clinics, other hospitals and after-school programs. The organization provides a wide range of legal counsel and also offers representation to children who are victims of abuse, on the verge of juvenile detention or who have disabilities and lack adequate resources.

In order to access legal services, children and their families visit the lawyer's office located in the hospital's pediatric clinic. The service is free of charge and operates with funds provided by Yale-New Haven, a grant from the Wiggin and Dana law firm and community donations.

Yale-New Haven is the largest hospital in New England, with 5,799 pediatric discharges in 2012.