Measuring the Health Impact of Medical-Legal Interventions on Low-Income Patients

Medha D. Makhlouf
Central West Justice Center

Valerie Zolezzi-Wyndham
Community Legal Aid

Follow this and additional works at: https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/chr_symposium

Part of the Civic and Community Engagement Commons, Community-Based Research Commons, Community Health and Preventive Medicine Commons, Health Law and Policy Commons, Medicine and Health Commons, and the Translational Medical Research Commons

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License.

https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/chr_symposium/2014/posters/10

This material is brought to you by eScholarship@UMMS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Community Engagement and Research Symposia by an authorized administrator of eScholarship@UMMS. For more information, please contact Lisa.Palmer@umassmed.edu.
Our Mission
Research shows that nearly all of the low-income people in the United States have at least one civil legal problem that negatively affects their health. Family Advocates of Central Massachusetts (FACM) is a medical-legal partnership that aims to improve the well-being of vulnerable families by helping patients address legal issues linked to health status, such as access to necessary public benefits, substandard housing, education issues, immigration status, and protection from abusive relationships. The partnership includes Community Legal Aid (CLA) and its subsidiary, Central West Justice Center (CWJC), and three medical partners: UMass Medical School, UMass Memorial Children’s Medical Center, and Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center. Medical providers are the sole community connection for many low-income families. Without legal care that is coordinated with medical care, they face an uphill battle in overcoming the social determinants of health that contribute to pervasive race- and class-based health disparities. When families ask their providers for help with issues that cannot be resolved in an exam room or with a prescription, FACM steps in.

Research Goal
We are reassessing our existing outcomes measurement tools to better measure, evaluate, and share the health impact of medical-legal interventions. Until now, we have not used health outcomes as a measure for effective intervention. Rather, we have relied on the well-established connection between social risks and health outcomes to show that mitigating such risks will improve health. We welcome input from researchers and community organizations about alternative validated measures that may help us measure and demonstrate the connection between access to legal services and improved health.

Contact Information
Medha D. Makhlouf, Esq.
Central West Justice Center
(508) 425-2818
mmakhlouf@cwjustice.org

Selection of Outcomes Currently Measured

Financial Security
- Obtain/maintain benefits
- Obtain/maintain earned income
- Obtain/maintain retirement income
- Obtain/maintain support/alimony
- Discharge debt
- Plan for future financial security

Healthcare Access
- Obtain medical equipment
- Obtain medical transportation
- Obtain/maintain health coverage
- Obtain/maintain medical care
- Obtain/maintain nursing/rest home
- Plan for future healthcare needs

Dignity & Safety
Family Law
- Increase physical safety
- Secure divorce from batterer
- Secure/maintain safe visitation
- Plan for future dignity and safety

Immigration
- Obtain immigration status
- Obtain lawful permanent residence
- Obtain stay of removal
- Improve benefit eligibility
- Reopen order of removal
- Plan for future immigration needs

Housing Stability
- Improve living conditions
- Obtain/retain affordable housing
- Obtain reasonable accommodation
- Combat discrimination
- Obtain emergency shelter
- Waive rent arrears
- Plan for future housing stability

Potential Health Outcome Measures
- Reduction in stress levels assessed by 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) instrument1, 2
- Improvement in wellbeing assessed by Measure Yourself Concerns and Wellbeing (MYCaW) instrument3
- Self-reported health status4
- Positive impact on family or loved ones1
- Improvement in financial situation1
- Treatment adherence1
- Improvement in ability to keep medical appointments1
- Prevented health-related behaviors, pregnancy outcomes, and rates of maternal employment for pregnant/postpartum clients3
- For asthmatic clients after an intervention to improve housing conditions: Post-intervention change in peak expiratory flow rate (PEFR), asthma severity class, medications, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and requirement for systemic steroids for symptom control4
- Use of primary care5

References