

## Rethinking Health Partnerships: Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine's Medical-Legal Partnership

### Background

The U.S. outspends every developed country in healthcare<sup>1</sup> but ranks poorly in health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Poor outcomes are connected to underspending on social services<sup>3</sup> and driven by social determinants of health (SDH) like income, education, immigration status, and discrimination.<sup>4</sup> Health professionals should be trained to approach health, and healthcare policy, by expanding how they think about what factors contribute to health, and which partners they should work with to address SDH.

Medical-legal partnership (MLP) is a healthcare innovation aimed at addressing SDH by adding lawyers to the healthcare team.<sup>5</sup> Lawyers are non-traditional health partners positioned to use their advocacy skills to address patient and population-wide impacts of SDH. Medical and law schools are ideal places to introduce this type of interprofessional collaboration. This poster will demonstrate how the MLP approach to addressing SDH is applied at Florida International University's Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine (HWCOM) and present data on how exposure to MLP is impacting HWCOM's students.

HWCOM is among institutions leading innovation in teaching SDH, interprofessional education, and medical-legal collaboration by way of its flagship service-learning program, Green Family Foundation Neighborhood Health Education Learning Program (NeighborhoodHELP).<sup>6</sup> NeighborhoodHELP includes a MLP with the College of Law. Through NeighborhoodHELP, interprofessional teams of medical, social work, nursing, physician

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assistant, education, and law students are assigned households in underserved communities. Each student team, supervised by faculty, is required to make regular household visits and provide health, social, and legal services. The medical curriculum teaches household-centered care and interprofessional collaboration through its Community Engaged Physician course, and didactics are reinforced through field interactions with households.

## **Methods**

Nationally, HWCUM is one of few academic institutions assessing the impact of MLP on undergraduate medical students. Ongoing research seeks to assess the impact of medical-legal didactic sessions on student's knowledge and attitude toward the legal profession and patient advocacy. In the first analysis, a one group pre-test, post-test study among 111 medical students was conducted in the Community Engaged Physician course. Wilcoxon signed-rank test and McNemar's test were used to assess the change in attitude at a 5% level of significance.

## **Result**

Medical students participating in NeighborhoodHELP showed significant improvements in knowledge and attitude toward medical-legal issues after the didactic session. Of the 111 FIU medical students who took the pre-test survey, 104 took the post-test survey. The mean knowledge and attitude scores were increased by 32.49% and 9.15% respectively. There was a significant improvement for all questions, with the p-value of <0.001.

## **Discussion**

Of the 300 MLPs in the U.S., ninety percent are in hospitals or clinics.<sup>7</sup> Only 34 health schools have adopted MLP into their curricula, (*Id.*) presenting an opportunity for 115 medical schools and hundreds of health professions programs.<sup>8</sup> Our result shows that didactic sessions are

a feasible and potentially impactful way of including SDH and medical-legal collaboration in health curricula. Without exposure to MLP, health students may not consider legal intervention in their thinking about health. In partnership, healthcare and legal service providers can help each other rethink health and health education.

## References

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