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Nov 7th, 8:00 AM


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

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Et al.

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Repository Citation

Makhoulf MD, Zolezzi-Wyndham V. (2014). Measuring the Health Impact of Medical-Legal Interventions on Low-Income Patients. Community Engagement and Research Symposia. <https://doi.org/10.13028/ag41-sc10>. Retrieved from https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/chr_symposium/2014/posters/10

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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.

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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



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

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



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) instrument^{1, 2}
- ❖ Improvement in wellbeing assessed by Measure Yourself Concerns and Wellbeing (MYCaW) instrument²
- ❖ Self-reported health status⁵
- ❖ Positive impact on family or loved ones¹
- ❖ Improvement in financial situation¹
- ❖ Treatment adherence¹
- ❖ Improvement in ability to keep medical appointments¹
- ❖ Prenatal 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

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