

***UNM Medical Legal Alliance:
Addressing Legal Determinants of
Health for Underserved New Mexicans***

**Testimony Before the New Mexico
Legislative Health & Human Services
Committee, July 3, 2013**

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Background on Medical Legal Alliance

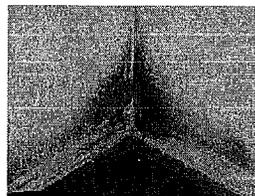
- One of the early medical-legal partnerships
- Idea borne of frustration: Doctors treating low-income children with the best medical care saw social & legal factors interfere with patients achieving real health
- Solution: A healthcare delivery model that integrates legal assistance into patient care
- Now a movement: <http://www.medical-legalpartnership.org/movement>

A Classic Paradigm

- Child with asthma in a moldy Section 8 house



- *How can a lawyer help?*



UNM Medical Legal Alliance

- Collaboration between UNM School of Law (SOL) Clinical Program, UNM Health Sciences Center (HSC) & UNM School of Medicine
- UNM SOL Community Lawyering Clinic students provide free legal services, under supervision of law faculty, to address social & legal determinants of health for low-income children & families
- UNM HSC Health Clinic Partners:
 - Young Children's Health Center
 - Southeast Heights Center for Family & Community Health
 - FOCUS Program & Clinic

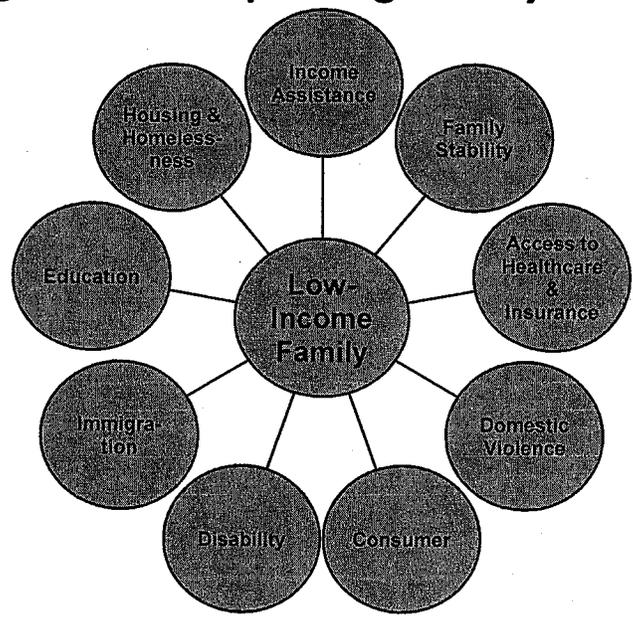
Program Components: Role of Law Students & Faculty

- Law students & faculty train healthcare providers to screen for legal barriers and refer to MLA
- Law students conduct intakes in the healthcare setting, increasing access to justice
- Legal advice, referrals & direct representation to patient-families
- Lawyer can become part of the treatment team- a key specialist

Program Components: Role of Law Students & Faculty (cont.)

- Case consultation with healthcare providers
- Train and educate healthcare providers on legal issues to improve their own awareness & advocacy
- Healthcare providers train law students on related health issues
- Collaboration around systemic reform

Legal Areas Impacting Family's Health



***Ensuring Better
Outcomes for
At-Risk Children***

Case: Joseph (age 9 yrs)

FAMILY

- Maternal grandmother is caring for Joseph while mother (who has custody) is incarcerated & in rehab for substance abuse
- Both Joseph & mother were physically abused by father

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

- Frequently suspended & failing school
- Difficulty following directions from adults

Case: Joseph (age 9 yrs)

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- Quick to anger & engages in self-hitting when upset
- Multiple fears & worries
- Diagnosed with ADHD, Anxiety Disorder, PTSD
- Pediatrician referral for Multi-Systemic Therapy to assist Joseph & family with achieving behavioral health, but Medicaid Managed Care Organization denied referral

**The research shows that Joseph
is more likely to:**

**EXPERIENCE POOR HEALTH OUTCOMES DUE TO
HIS MULTIPLE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD
EXPERIENCES (ACEs):**

- Chronic disease
- Depression, suicide attempts, anxiety, other poor mental health outcomes over his lifetime

Felitti, VJ, et al, Am J Prev Med 1998; 14(4): 245-258
Dube, SR, et al, Prev Med 2003; 37: 268-277

**The research shows that Joseph
is also more likely to:**

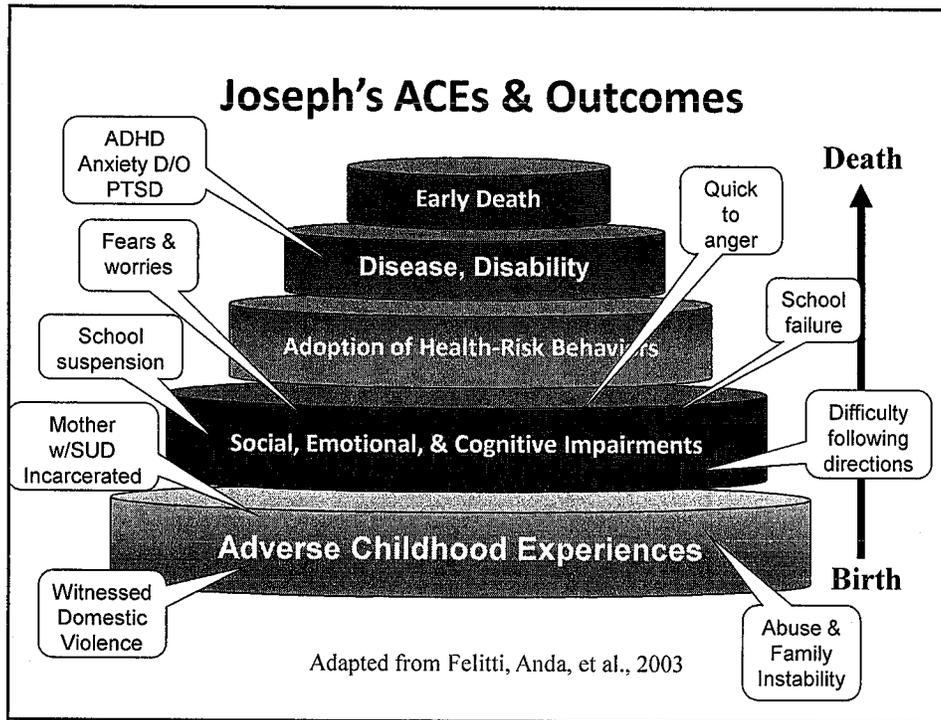
**EXPERIENCE POOR SOCIAL & LEGAL
OUTCOMES:**

- Entry into foster care system
- Drop out of school
- School-to-prison pipeline
- Incarceration

How can we disrupt this path and ensure better outcomes for Joseph?

Engage medical & legal resources collaboratively to address:

- Family instability → kinship guardianship
- School failure → appropriate special education services
- Behavioral problems at home & school → mental health services through Medicaid



How can the UNM Medical Legal Alliance affect more change and reach more people?

Ideas for Expansion

- **Grow our ability to provide access to justice & ensure improved outcomes for patients**
- **Explore development of “TeleLaw” infrastructure to extend services and integrate legal assistance into healthcare settings in underserved areas in other parts of the state**
- **Develop intensive interdisciplinary program to study & address systemic community health problems in underserved neighborhoods**

Questions?

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