Medical Legal Partnership of Camden

Rutgers School of Law–Camden (R-Law), Cooper Medical School at Rowan University (CMSRU), and Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers (Camden Coalition), three anchor institutions in Camden that already provide hundreds of hours of free or low-cost services to Camden residents, are joining forces to create a Medical Legal Partnership. This effort is being led by two Rutgers–Camden law faculty, Kim Mutcherson, Professor of Law, and Carol Wallinger, Clinical Professor of Law.

The relationship between legal problems and health problems has long been clear to those working in law and medicine. For instance, residents of substandard housing with mold or rodents, in violation of sanitary codes, live in an environment that can lead to or exacerbate health conditions like asthma. Senior citizens improperly denied benefits, like access to social services or long-term care, are prevented from getting the healthcare they require.

The idea of creating partnerships that integrate legal services into a healthcare setting is one that institutions have begun to aggressively pursue in the past few decades. Despite its relatively short history, the medical legal partnership (MLP) model has proven popular and, more importantly, successful. Dozens of law schools around the country have partnered with local medical services providers to create MLPs that provide free legal services to low-income individuals related to health harming conditions in their lives.

The MLP-Camden project is currently in the initial planning phase, gathering the detailed data about patients’ legal needs that the partner institutions require to determine their specific nature and to make well-informed decisions regarding the creation of the MLP. During the 2015–2016 school year, the clinic will enroll students and begin providing free legal services to patients.
RUTGERS SCHOOL OF LAW–CAMDEN
CIVIL PRACTICE CLINIC SERVING SOUTH JERSEY FOR OVER 20 YEARS

Last January marked the 20th anniversary of the Rutgers School of Law–Camden Civil Practice Clinic (CPC). Founded in January 1993 as the Rutgers Elderlaw Clinic, the clinic initially focused on providing legal services and community education for Camden’s growing elderly population and provided a clinical legal education for up to 16 students a year. In 1996, the Elderlaw Clinic became the centerpiece of an expanding Rutgers Civil Practice Clinic. Today the Civil Practice Clinic provides legal services and community education to the broader South Jersey community in a wide range of substantive legal areas and provides a clinical experience to nearly 40 students a year.

Based in the city of Camden, the CPC aims to not only provide significant learning opportunities for students, but also to be responsive to community needs and cases are selected in order to provide services where the demand is greatest. Frequently, cases are referred to the CPC by legal service organizations, social service agencies, and even by court personnel. The majority of the requests for services are directly from the Camden and South Jersey communities.

Over the past 20 years, CPC legal interns have handled hundreds of cases and provided well over 100,000 hours of pro bono legal services to the South Jersey community in a wide variety of areas such as consumer fraud, landlord/tenant, family law, estate planning, breach of contract, Social Security disability, and guardianship.

Some of the work CPC interns have performed include:

**Preparing for trial** and successfully settling the case of a senior citizen who was dissatisfied by the work of the home improvement contractor she hired to renovate her kitchen. Not only did the students successfully negotiate to have the contractor redo the renovations to our client’s satisfaction, the contractor agreed to pay for the expenses of the expert hired to inspect the contractor’s work.

**Drafting and filing** an answer and cross-claim on behalf of an elderly client who unknowingly co-signed a loan allowing her son to purchase a motorcycle. At the time the loan was executed, our client was suffering from a medication-induced dementia.

**Assisting a client** in navigating her way through the Surrogate Court when her ex-husband died leaving her executor of his will.

**Obtaining the dismissal** of an eviction proceeding against a mother living in public housing with her child. The eviction proceedings were based on the activities of our client’s brother. Through a compelling motion to dismiss filed only a week after meeting their client, the students not only defended their client’s right to remain but also resolved the issue through informal discussions with opposing counsel in order to achieve a long-term resolution to the matter.

**Successfully settling** a complex consumer matter with multiple defendants. In this very litigious case, our clients were defrauded by a home improvement contractor after their home was badly damaged by fire in the middle of winter. The case, which has been in the clinic for three years, involved the work of multiple teams of students conducting discovery, depositions, engaging in motion practice, preparing for trial, negotiating with a very adversarial opposing party, extensively counseling clients concerning their options and drafting numerous settlement agreements.

**Arguing an appeal** in Tax Court on behalf of an elderly Atlantic County resident who was denied a property tax rebate because she had not accrued sufficient years of residence in her current home. The client was relocated to her new home because her previous home was taken through eminent domain.

CPC interns also continue to represent individuals in Social Security disability matters, and now represent children in addition to adults. Interns have successfully represented and obtained benefits for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, behavioral disorders, severe asthma, cerebral palsy, as well as other disabilities.

Two years ago, the CPC began a partnership with the Bancroft organization in Haddonfield, NJ to represent families seeking guardianship of their young adult, legally incapacitated children – legal work that often costs families thousands of dollars in attorneys’ fees. Our guardianship work has since expanded and we now provide this service to families of disabled individuals throughout South Jersey.

More than 20 years after the Civil Practice Clinic began in a small office on the second floor of the law school, it continues to grow and offer a rich learning experience for law students and high-quality legal services to the Camden and South Jersey communities.
Clinical Professor Ruth Anne Robbins has offered her expertise on domestic violence law to improve legislation pending in New Jersey. In collaboration with Jessica Miles, a member of the Seton Hall School of Law clinical faculty, Robbins offered comments on pending bills proposed in the wake of the highly publicized Ray Rice domestic violence case, with an eye toward informing the legislature about the hidden potential for the proposed legislation to water-down or hinder existing stringent response measures. In particular, they provided comments on bills designed to create a new permanent civil restraining order system, paralleling domestic violence restraining orders, for plaintiffs who do not have a romantic or family-like relationship with the defendant. In October, Professors Robbins and Miles, and a Rutgers Law Clinic Fellow, Travis Stewart, met with New Jersey Senator Jennifer Beck (11th Legis. Dist./Monmouth) to discuss the breadth of the pending legislation and the possible overwhelming effects legislation might have on those courts hearing domestic violence matters. Senator Beck has since recommended amendments to the pending legislation, designed to address some of those issues. In December, the Senate and Assembly jointly agreed to introduce a new bill, the Sexual Assault Survivor Protection Act authorizing this type of civil restraining order in only the narrow situation of sexual crimes.

**PRACTICE EXTERNSHIP: LAW STUDENTS IN ACTION**

Representing individuals on a child abuse registry is not a goal for many law students, but some are willing to work to assure fair treatment for all criminal defendants.

**Andrew Munger ’15** spent many hours during the fall term of 2014 working for the Mercer County Public Defender, assigned to a Special Hearing unit where he faced just such cases. Should a 35-year-old man with no offenses since his conviction at age 19 (of an intimate relationship with a consenting, though underage, girlfriend) have a chance to be removed from a public sex offender list? Andrew handled these hearings conscientiously, and thoughtfully reflected on the justice issues they presented in journal comments written for his Practice Externship assignments. A transfer student, Andrew is currently enrolled in our Child and Family Advocacy clinic.

In a big city criminal courtroom, many cases are prepared and few go forward, witnesses are planned but surprises are sure to occur, and errors in law enforcement or inadequate representation of defendants can jeopardize the just outcome of a prosecution. **Angella Middleton ’14** worked in that system during the fall term of 2014, before graduating in December, carefully handling many preliminary steps in court as a student lawyer at the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office. Coming to law school after several years as an administrator at a law firm, Angella is focused on a litigation career. Even as a part-time student over the past four years, she found time for leadership in the law school community, in trial competitions and law journal, coaching a high school mock trial team, and serving as president of the Black Law Students Association.

As the city of Camden struggles to redevelop, an interesting nonprofit works to bring new ideas to the task. **Perry Farhat ’15**, who has a degree and prior work experience in city planning, entered for the Cooper’s Ferry Partnership during the fall term 2014. While learning from the varied professionals on the Cooper’s Ferry team, located a few blocks from the campus, Perry took the lead role in drafting a plan for contributions from all major institutions in the city—colleges, medical facilities, businesses—to support a special services district that will improve the safety and attractiveness of central Camden. This semester, Perry has a fellowship from the Eagleton Institute for Politics on the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers. While still enrolled in his final term at the law school, he is both continuing to work for Cooper’s Ferry and also working two days each week for the Woodbridge (NJ) Redevelopment Agency.

**PROFESSIONALISM EDUCATION AND PRACTICE: SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS’ TRANSITION**

“Think of yourself as a lawyer from the day you walk into the law school and you will walk out as well-prepared as any graduate in the country.” This is the philosophy of Advanced Professionalism: Preparation for Practice, a cutting edge seminar designed by Clinical Professor Pam Jenoff. The course works with second and third year students to identify their goals for after graduation and develop a blueprint for getting there and doing well once they’ve arrived.

“‘I spent nearly a decade in practice, both at a firm and in-house, and I ran summer programs and did a lot of recruiting,’ says Professor Jenoff. ‘I realized that through this course I could give my students the ‘playbook’ of everything I wish I had known about both finding a job and succeeding in those critical early years.”

The course includes modules and simulations on ethics in action, client relationships, workload management and work-life balance. Each student undertakes significant field work, including informational interviews of multiple practitioners in areas that are of interest to that student, shadowing practicing attorneys, and developing the student’s professional network. The students support one another, by reporting back on field experiences, and working on collaborative team projects. Each student leaves with a developmental plan so that he or she can continue on the path toward professionalism.

Students have found summer jobs and other placements as a result of the contacts they made in this course. The course has received high praise from the students, a number of whom have remarked that the course should be mandatory.
IMMIGRANT JUSTICE CLINIC

The Immigrant Justice Clinic had many successes this semester, including obtaining lawful permanent residence for two teenagers who were abused, neglected, or abandoned by parents and who had traveled to the United States on their own. Other noteworthy cases include the following.

Firstly, a client, a Vietnam era veteran, was convicted of multiple minor criminal offenses for which he never served any jail time. One such conviction, from the 1980s, allegedly involved the sale of $10 of marijuana and was deemed by an Immigration Judge to be an “Aggravated Felony” severely limiting our client’s eligibility for relief.

In addition, a third-year student represented youth on an appeal to the appellate division and participated in amicus briefs. CJIC students also provide New Jersey youth with post-disposition representation and continue to visit clients after they have been placed in juvenile facilities.

CHILD AND FAMILY ADVOCACY CLINIC

The Child and Family Advocacy Clinic (CFAC) represents at-risk children and families from across southern New Jersey in a variety of family law, education, and public benefits matters. In many cases, students served as the “Law Guardian” representing the interests of children involved with the Division of Child Protection & Permanency (formerly “DFYS”) due to abuse and neglect. In addition, students worked collaboratively with community partners on public policy and systems reform efforts to improve the lives of children statewide.

One current case involves “Allen,” who is a 13-year-old boy living with his paternal aunt due to neglect by his mother and father. When students from CFAC first met Allen, he was living in a foster home and had not yet been allowed to visit with his half-sister. The law students tracked down several relatives and successfully argued for Allen to be moved to a paternal aunt’s home. The judge also ordered weekly sibling visits to begin immediately.

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW–CAMDEN’S CLINICAL PROGRAM is the law school’s own teaching law firm staffed by faculty and students. Each year, the clinics handle over one hundred cases and student attorneys provide more than 25,000 hours of free legal services to the Camden community. All of our clinics are designed to assist lower income individuals who otherwise would have difficulty obtaining representation. In addition to providing valuable legal services to the Camden Community, the Clinical Program challenges students to apply legal theory to the problems of real people and to reflect on the day-to-day challenges of legal practice. Students enrolled in one of the clinics have primary responsibility for the representation of clients with intensive supervision from clinical faculty who are admitted to practice in New Jersey.

To learn more about our comprehensive clinic offerings, including the Domestic Violence Clinic; its Domestic Violence Pro Bono Project partner, Hybrid Clinics (Advanced Legal Writing: Community Based Practice, International Human Rights Advocacy, Public Interest Research and Writing, and Small Business Counseling), and Externships, visit camlaw.rutgers.edu/clinics.
Twenty years ago, the law school created the Domestic Violence Pro Bono Project (DV Project), an effort to enhance access to justice for survivors of domestic violence in their efforts to break free of the cycle of violence. Trained law student volunteers began staffing daily rotations at the Camden County Superior Court. Their purpose was to provide basic information about the legal resources available to survivors of domestic violence of modest means who could not afford an attorney. Over the years, hundreds of law student volunteers have assisted thousands of survivors in Camden County by helping them understand the court system and the legal and practical implications of obtaining a restraining order.

The DV Project, which remains popular amongst students and community partners, led to the creation of the Domestic Violence Clinic (DVC) in 2003. The DVC is a trial advocacy clinic that relies on third year law students to represent survivors in final restraining order bench trials before the Superior Court. Students gain insight to both civil and criminal process, exposure to fact investigation, and trial experience. They can also explore the many aspects of layer-client relationships. As one former student notes, “This course is the exact type of practical experience any law school student should have if they anticipate practicing the law. It prepares you for almost every type of situation, procedure and occurrence that can happen as a lawyer. It trains you in interviewing and counseling skills, pretrial and trial experience, memo and brief writing and also teaches you how to expect the unexpected.” Recently, the DVC has begun handling more unusual matters, including appeals, motions for reconsideration and cross-jurisdictional child custody cases involving domestic violence.