

For Immediate Release: Jan. 14, 2008

Contact: Jim Kearney, MidPenn Legal Services, (717) 299-0971, Ext. 2215

In the Spirit of Dr. King

Doctors and Lawyers to Work Side by Side to Help Lancaster's Neediest

"The best way to solve any problem is to remove its cause."

—Martin Luther King Jr., 1958

When: Friday, Jan. 18, at 3:30 P.M.

Where: SouthEast Lancaster Health Services, 625 South Duke St., Lancaster,
2nd Floor Conference Room

Poor people's lives are hazardous to their health. They are chronic candidates for being homeless, hungry and the targets of violence. A new medical-legal partnership, the first in the state, is thinking outside the box.

MidPenn Legal Services and SouthEast Lancaster Health Services today announce their Medical Legal Partnership for Families. It is based on a national model that puts a lawyer in a medical setting to address the root social causes of illness, such as substandard housing, hunger and domestic violence. This innovative collaboration allows doctors to treat more effectively the chronic illnesses often suffered by low-income members of our community, including diabetes, asthma, and depression. While the public may best remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for his struggles for racial equality, his overarching mission was to better the lives of all poor people.

Dr. Bill Fife, medical director of SouthEast Lancaster Health Services, said, "As a family doctor caring for many patients living in poverty, I often find my therapeutic efforts stymied not by disease but by environmental factors such as substandard housing, patients' limited understanding of their legal rights and family violence. Many of these factors can be improved through legal means. I look forward to our partnership with the legal community in extending our health center's therapeutic arms into the legal realm. I think that together we can truly offer comprehensive care to our patients — treating all of the factors that create and maintain disease."

Jim Orgass, MidPenn managing attorney, added, "A wide range of health problems are caused by living conditions — for example, children suffering from asthma may live in poorly maintained housing. Both professions have their limits in attacking the problem, but together we can be more effective. It is a preventive approach to law that allows us to keep problems from getting out of hand. By preventing homelessness for a family, a child's diabetes is much more likely to be kept under good control. By meeting with a victim of domestic violence in the

exam room, a lawyer can help obtain a PFA immediately and prevent more severe physical abuse.”

Catherine Schultz, a NYU law school grad with four years of experience with the Lancaster MidPenn office, will fill the new position. “I’ve always had an interest in medical matters and I look forward to working in the collaboration,” said Schultz.

Beginning Jan. 7, Schultz will split her time between the SE Lancaster Health Services clinic and the MidPenn office at 38 North Christian St.

This new project would not be possible without the support of the following organizations: The Lancaster Health Osteopathic Foundation, The Lancaster County Community Foundation, United Way of Lancaster, St Joseph’s Health Ministries, the Feree Foundation, the Roda Nast Foundation, Lancaster General Hospital and the City of Lancaster. This is true collaboration between two of Lancaster County’s long standing nonprofit agencies and their very generous local funding partners.

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