BACKGROUND

- While research indicates that 98 percent of people living with HIV (PLWH) experience legal problems in various healthcare, immigration, and employment, few are successful in receiving needed legal assistance.
- Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) is an intervention where lawyers work alongside healthcare providers to detect and address harm legal problems and social needs.
- Whitman-Walker Health (WWW), a DC-based FOHC that specializes in LGBTQ health and HIV care, has provided legal services as part of HIV care for over 30 years.
- Limited work has examined the relationship between health outcomes and the integration of legal services in healthcare delivery.

OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

- Explore the relationship between specific health outcomes and the legal interventions for PLWH, specifically:
  - Viral load suppression
  - Adherence to medical care (as measured by kept vs. missed appointments)
- Describe whether there is a difference between WWW HIV+ patients who received both medical and legal services and those who only received medical services.

METHODS

- Data were extracted from 3,344 PLWH who were WWW patients from 2012 through 2016.
- The data included sex, gender, race, ethnicity, income, housing stability, missed appointments, scheduled appointments, viral load results, and state of residence.
- The data also included whether these patients received legal services and the types of legal services received.
- The study population was broken down into two groups: (1) patients who had only received medical services and (2) those patients who received both medical and legal services within the study time period.
- Outcome variables selected were: (1) viral load suppression as a health outcome measure and (2) missed medical appointment rates as an indicator for patient engagement in care.
- Two sample t-tests were conducted to determine if there were statistical differences in viral load suppression and appointment adherence between both patient groups. A series of one-way ANOVA tests were conducted on subgroups to determine the impact of public benefit and insurance navigation services, which are also services that WWW Legal Services team provides.

RESULTS

**Study Population**

- Over half of the population in the study identified as LGBTQ.
- The majority of HIV+ patients who received medical care at WWW also interact with WWW’s house Legal Services team.
- Legal Services team includes Public Benefits and Insurance Navigators (PBINs) who assist with health insurance needs and are paralegals screening for health harm legal need. PBINs assisted 95% of HIV+ patients who received both medical and legal services.
- The primary comparison groups are:
  1. Patients who only received medical services (n= 1,015)
  2. Patients who received both medical and legal services (n= 2,037 / 61 %)

**Subgroups**

- Patients who only received PBIN services (n= 1,015)
- Patients who did not receive PBIN services as part of other legal services they received (n= 95)
- Patients who received PBIN services along with other legal services (n= 925)

- These two groups were similar in the demographic characteristics of sex, gender, race and ethnicity, income, and housing stability.

**Legal Intervention and Viral Load Suppression**

- HIV+ patients who had a Legal Services intervention had a statistically significant greater rate of viral load suppression (63%) than patients who only received medical services (69%).

**Medical & Legal**

- PBIN services had a positive impact on viral load suppression, especially when administered alongside other Legal Services interventions.

**Medical Only**

- We concluded with statistical significance that patients receiving legal services missed fewer appointments. P value < .0001 at 95% confidence.

**Additional Findings Pertaining to D.C. Wards as Indicator of Health Outcome**

- For patients who received both medical and legal services, where they resided in the District had an impact on their viral load suppression:
  - Ward 1: 67%
  - Ward 2: 83%
  - Ward 3: 77%
  - Ward 4: 67%
  - Ward 5: 32%

**LIMITATIONS**

- A few additional limitations exist, as follows:
  - A lack of consistency existed between how legal and medical collected these top three practice areas accounted for
  - Viral load suppression measure constituted the last two consecutive tests

**CONCLUSION**

Receiving Legal Services led to what we are calling “a protective health effect” on PLWH. These findings confirmed what we had long suspected — addressing patients’ legal needs impacts positively their health — measured by a health outcome variable — viral load suppression — and a patient engagement variable — adherence to appointments.

- Higher adherence to medical appointments for patients who received both medical and legal services leads us to believe that the added connection and support lawyers provide as part of the medical team strengthen patients’ engagement in care.
- Public Benefits and Insurance Navigation services as a centralized screening and engagement service enhance the Legal team’s intervention.
- Integrating legal services as part of the healthcare delivery team exemplifies using expertise to solve social needs and health harming legal problems.
- The much lower rates of viral suppression among medical and legal clients who resided in the District’s poorest wards likely highlight higher levels of health harming legal problems and social needs generally and support the need to continue hiring two lawyers on the team at our Martin Robinson Center in Ward 8 to enhance access and address the unique needs of those residents.

- While this study focused on PLWH, many people face health harming legal problems, and health care has come to recognize that over half of health is impacted by social needs not genetic or purely health factors.
- WWW’s care team seeks to use the right professional, providing the right expertise and care, at the right time.
- Whitman-Walker Health’s innovative integrated healthcare delivery model treats the whole patient and a lawyer offering “legal care” is a critical member of the team.

**REFERENCES**