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Newsroom: Tobin Tyler on Medical-Legal Partnership

Roger Williams University School of Law

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Newsroom

Tobin Tyler on Medical-Legal Partnership

RWU Law's Liz Tobin Tyler moderated a panel on improving medical-legal relations in the health care system, co-sponsored with Brown University Medical School.

From THE BROWN DAILY HERALD: "[Panel targets law's involvement in health care](#)" by Jasmine Fuller



Wednesday, March 14, 2012: Panelists advocated improving medical-legal relations in the health care system Tuesday afternoon during the second part of a three-part seminar series entitled "Social Determinants of Health." Doctors, lawyers, health care workers, community members and students gathered in Hunter Laboratory for the second seminar, "Law and Social Determinants: Legal Interventions to Address Health Disparities," in which panelists advocated for better communication between professionals in the health and legal fields.



Liz Tobin Tyler, director of public service and community partnerships at Roger Williams University, served as moderator. Laws can be used as a mechanism

for improving social conditions that contribute to poor health outcomes, **she said**. It is also critical to consider how law influences community settings and how law is implemented, **she added**.

Panelist Sara Rosenbaum, founding chair of the Department of Health Policy at George Washington University, opened the seminar by providing an overview of the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The law is “essentially pushing and pulling at every legal lever we’ve got,” she said, referring to the way in which the law drastically alters the foundations of health insurance and health programs in the United States.

“Health care is only a piece of actually getting health,” said Megan Sandel, panelist and interim executive director of the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership. She talked about the necessity of incorporating legal assistance into health care as a form of preventative medicine. Sandel compared the impact of a lawyer being brought in to force a landlord to remove mice from a single home to a national policy mandating suitable housing conditions for all citizens. A medical-legal partnership works its way from patients up to legislation, eventually leading to the implementation of policies to assist large populations, she said.

The Affordable Care Act offers the chance to entirely reassess the way we perceive health care, Sandel said. The law urges doctors to “completely rethink diagnosis and treatment,” Rosenbaum said.

Panelist Ellen Lawton, lead national consultant for Walmart’s pro bono medical-legal partnership, advised those forming such partnerships “to bring in the health care teams that are serving those clients that the legal offices are also serving.” Though health care employees were initially reluctant to work with lawyers, the relationships formed have been beneficial to all parties, she said.

Sandel agreed. “You can’t do it alone,” she said. “

You have to work inter-professionally and cross-disciplinarily.”

“Health is a function of social conditions,” said audience member David Egilman, clinical associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine. But he offered a different perspective, adding that individual citizens — not just physicians — should possess the education and initiative necessary to advocate for themselves.

Regardless of how change is enacted, Rosenbaum offered a brief summary: “You have to be willing to see the world in a different way,” she said.

*The seminar was sponsored by the Taubman Center for Public Policy, **Roger Williams University** School of Law, the Alpert Medical School and the Public Health Program.*