Law and (Getting Things in) Order: How to Effectively Bring Lawyers into the Palliative Care Team (FR402)

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Objectives

- Describe three types of collaborations with palliative care clinicians and attorneys.
- Recognize strategies to start a medical-legal team or collaboration at their own institution, based on examples from national experts.

Partnerships between legal professionals and clinicians are growing rapidly to meet the legal needs of patients with serious and advanced illness. Three prevailing models exist for collaborative care to address medical-legal needs. These include medical-legal programs (MLPs), consultation services, and ad hoc use of hotlines. In the MLP model, attorneys provide on-site legal assistance to address a variety of needs, ranging from advance care planning through financial distress to guardianship and custody issues. In consultative approaches, legal professionals may regularly meet with palliative care teams during interdisciplinary meetings or offer support through a co-rounding model. In addition, and also quite valuable, is engagement of legal services when certain needs are identified, either through community resources, hotlines, or one-to-one consultations. These alliances can be extremely valuable in complex medical cases and for those with serious illnesses, where palliative care clinicians themselves could benefit from an extra layer of legal support.

In this concurrent session, we will introduce the principles of medical-legal partnerships utilizing a team of palliative care and legal experts, including three attorneys representing academic and community organizations. Using case studies of actual patients, we will highlight typical legal needs of patients with complex illnesses and various ways for lawyers to become engaged members of the healthcare delivery team. We will introduce a legal screener tool, developed as a way to triage potential legal needs. We will then describe three different and unique medical legal partnerships from across the country that address the needs of cancer and HIV/AIDS patients. Lastly, we will provide audience members with lessons learned and tools to find local legal resources, engage community attorneys as part of the palliative care team, and establish a medical-legal program when ready.