Difficulties of Being a Generalist

NCLSN Meeting

November 6, 2014
Cancer and the Myriad of Legal Issues that May Follow

- Health insurance
- Rights in the workplace
- Maximizing income
- Advanced plans
- Housing stability
- Debtor creditor issues
- Estate planning
- Immigration

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The Generalist’s Intake

- Comprehensive intake skills
  - Must elicit information that will identify whether client has legal issues beyond what has brought him/her to attorney
  - Must be an active listener to connect the facts shared with the various legal systems
  - Important to be able to put a floor of stability under the client and think ahead of the problems identified to truly stabilize client.
Flexibility in Handling Caseload Crucial

- Juggling workload can be a challenge.
- Ability to prioritize tasks and re-prioritize on short notice is key factor for the attorney representing this population.
- Clients may have a sudden turn for the worse in their prognosis and work that the attorney thought they could do next week must be done in the next day (e.g., advance plans or will).
The Generalist’s Legal Support System

- Few attorneys starting in this field possess knowledge in all of the legal areas that arise with a client with cancer.
- Needs assessment at the outset may identify which legal issues are most prevalent with the population and attorney can build expertise based on that.
- Take advantage of all possible legal resources to support work:
  - Be part of a larger law office that can provide guidance in substantive areas or take cases
  - Law schools
  - Pro bono networks trained in specific areas

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The Generalist’s Emotional Support System

- Few attorneys possess the training to deal with the emotional aspects of working for clients with cancer
  - Very easy to identify with clients
  - Clients lives are falling apart and they are scared
  - Clients may die while attorney is handling legal matter
- Use social workers where clients receive treatment
  - Refer clients back to their social worker for emotional support
  - Have social workers cross train you on setting boundaries and self-care

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Take-Away

- Steep learning curve
- May need to handle fewer cases while developing knowledge base
- By taking advantage of all available resources you can effectively help put a floor of stability under your clients with cancer
- Rewards to client huge
Discussion