



15 Years



# 15 Voices

Complementing Healthcare with Legal Care



LegalHealth

**NLAG**  
NEW YORK LEGAL ASSISTANCE GROUP

## OUR PARTNERS

Bellevue Hospital Center  
CancerCare  
Coler Specialty Hospital and Nursing Facility  
Coney Island Hospital  
Elmhurst Hospital Center  
Harlem Hospital Center  
Jacobi Medical Center  
James J. Peters VA Medical Center  
Kings County Hospital Center  
Lincoln Medical Center  
VA NY Harbor Healthcare System  
Maimonides Medical Center  
Metropolitan Hospital  
MJHS  
Montefiore Medical Center  
Mount Sinai Hospital  
Mount Sinai Beth Israel  
Mount Sinai St. Luke's  
New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University  
Medical Center  
New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center  
North Central Bronx Hospital  
Northport VA Medical Center  
NYU Langone Medical Center, Laura and Isaac  
Perlmutter Cancer Center  
Queens Hospital Center  
Ralph Lauren Center for Cancer Care  
Woodhull Medical Center

## TO OUR FRIENDS & SUPPORTERS

On May 15, 2001 a headline in the *New York Times* – “Boston Medical Center Turns to Lawyers for a Cure” – caught the eyes of both of us. One had seed money to explore how she could build on her experience as the Legal Director at the Gay Men’s Health Crisis to bring free legal services to people struggling with a range of serious illnesses. The other, an attorney and parent of an asthmatic two-year-old, identified with the law as a “cure,” and decided it was time to make a career shift from private practice. With a nonprofit law firm, the New York Legal Assistance Group, open to entrepreneurial approaches to legal services, and a hospital ready to host a medical-legal partnership clinic, LegalHealth was launched in November 2001.

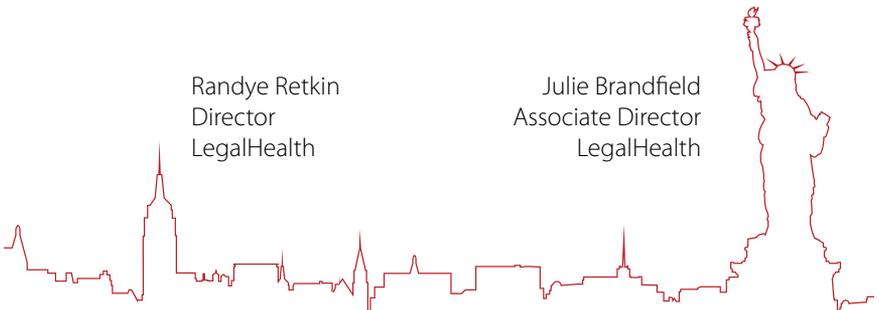
The “sales” pitch was new at the time and not an easy one, but eventually we made our case: nonmedical issues affect patient health. It doesn’t matter how much asthma medication you give a patient if he is living with mold or other agents that trigger his symptoms. It doesn’t matter that you can provide the bone-marrow transplant that can save a person’s life if her immigration status means she has no health insurance. Lawyers can solve these problems. And, if you bring them into the hospital, where patients feel safe, they are more likely to be comfortable working with an attorney.

Fast forward to the Affordable Care Act of 2014 under which the reform of healthcare includes addressing the social determinants of health. In New York City, this was already understood. By 2014, every public hospital had a LegalHealth clinic, as well as most of the major hospital systems and two VA Hospitals. Today, we’re on the cusp of being integrated into additional provider systems under a State Medicaid reform program that hopes to bring medical and social services together to reduce avoidable hospital use by 25 per cent.

This growth was unimaginable when we started 15 years ago, nor could we have imagined the dedicated team of attorneys, paralegals and others who have been with us through the years, the supportive healthcare professionals who have referred patients they knew could benefit from legal services, and the foundations, hospitals and State and City governments who have funded our work. Together we have demonstrated that we can impact health outcomes for vulnerable people when a lawyer is part of the care team.

Randy Retkin  
Director  
LegalHealth

Julie Brandfield  
Associate Director  
LegalHealth

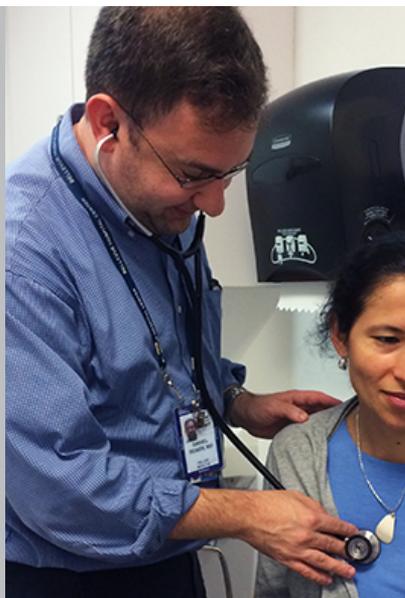


# Access

“I never expected that being a doctor would mean standing in front of a 28-year-old with curable cancer and not being able to treat him. Not because there were no treatments available, or because he was too sick, but because he was an undocumented immigrant and not eligible for insurance. That isn't something you learn in medical school, that some patients won't be treated despite being in one of the most medically advanced and innovative countries. The LegalHealth attorney Domna works endlessly to figure out how we can get a patient insured so they don't lose their chance at real treatment just because they were born in the wrong country. She gives patients, and us, hope.”

## Dr. Daniel Boxer

Hematology Oncology Fellow  
Laura & Isaac Perlmutter  
Cancer Center  
NYU School of Medicine and  
Langone Medical Center



*60% of health is determined by social and environmental factors such as income, housing and education.*

# Justice

“I was receiving treatment as a victim of domestic violence when my social worker referred me to LegalHealth’s clinic and I met my attorney, Norma. Thank you is not enough for her. She helped me gain legal status, she helped me file my divorce, she helped me get custody of my kids and most importantly, she helped me be reunited with my kids after they were kidnapped by their father. Norma and the whole group at LegalHealth worked from the bottom of their hearts and helped me believe in myself, helped me stand up and now I am no longer a victim.”



Samah Habibi

LegalHealth Client | Patient, Elmhurst Hospital

*Low-income, undocumented immigrants facing serious health problems are among New York City’s most vulnerable populations.*

# Dedication

“One of the greatest things about the work that we do is providing relief for clients who are juggling so much – chronic or life-threatening illness, inability to access appropriate healthcare because of a lack of insurance, inability to work and the financial crisis that follows, the risk of homelessness, and the uncertainty that arises from a lack of immigration status. Being able to tell a client, ‘I can help you and you don’t have to worry about that right now,’ provides a sense of relief that is not only emotional, but also physical. You can physically see a client’s relief. And there is no greater feeling than knowing you made a difference.”



Regina Chessari

Staff Attorney  
LegalHealth

*You can find LegalHealth attorneys at a patient’s bedside, home or their doctor’s clinic: they go where the patient is being treated.*



# Advocacy

“Our clients are often the inspiration for our advocacy. Because of clients like Demetrius Davis, who was forced to spend months in the hospital because the shelter system was not able to accommodate his needs as a single adult with stage 4 cancer, we formed the Coalition for Housing and Health, which advocates for people like Demetrius – the medically homeless. Someday I hope to see his name on a bill mandating appropriate shelters for medically frail single adults.”

Julie Brandfield

Associate Director  
LegalHealth

*In addition to direct service, LegalHealth advocates for policy change at the federal, state and city level.*

# Stability

“When my wife died after battling numerous health conditions, my landlord tried to evict me from the rent-stabilized apartment we’d shared for 29 years. My social worker referred me to the LegalHealth clinic. The attorney, Nina, turned everything around. She told me I had the legal right to stay in the apartment and represented me in Housing Court. After months in court, I won my right to take over my wife’s apartment. I haven’t had a problem with my landlord since. I was glad that I was referred to LegalHealth – what they did was unbelievable, and they helped me get through a very tough time in my life.”



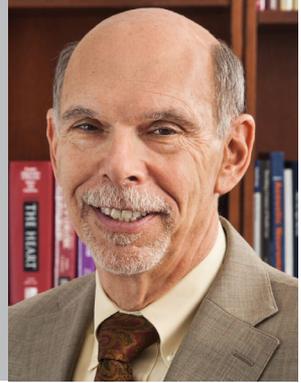
Derrick Baker

LegalHealth Client | Patient, Montefiore Medical Center

*One in six people needs legal care to be healthy.*

# Dr. Kenneth Davis

President & CEO  
Mount Sinai Health System



## *Leadership*

“The primary goal of every health care institution is to improve the health of the patients who walk through its doors. Doing so in today’s dramatically changing healthcare landscape demands that we leverage every opportunity to innovate and collaborate. By addressing the link between poverty and health, our partnership with LegalHealth has improved lives and lowered costs.”

Excerpted from an Op-Ed published in *Crain’s New York* by Drs. Davis and Raju.



# Dr. Ramanathan Raju

President & CEO  
NYC Health + Hospitals

*Fifteen years ago LegalHealth began with just one hospital partner.  
Today we work with 26 hospitals in the New York Region.*



## Vision

“For 15 years LegalHealth has served as a model for medical-legal partnerships throughout the country. I believe so strongly in this program that I sponsored legislation – signed into law in 2011 – creating the Health-Related Legal Services Program, making New York the first state to formally recognize medical-legal partnerships. Today, LegalHealth’s leadership in bringing medical and social services together to improve care is even more important.”

**Richard N. Gottfried**

New York State Assembly Member  
Chair, NYS Assembly Health Committee

*New York State has been a leader in recognizing the role of legal advocacy in improving the lives of poor and vulnerable patients.*

# Pro Bono

“Four years ago I began offering pro bono services to LegalHealth’s homebound clients, helping them to complete their Powers of Attorney and drawing up their last wills and testaments. I get so much back from the time I spend with them in their homes – listening to their stories and helping contribute to their peace of mind and maintain their sense of dignity as they make their final arrangements to take care of their affairs and their loved ones. It is deeply satisfying work.”

## Christopher Paci

Partner  
DLA Piper



*In the past 10 years, attorneys from 70 law firms and corporations have contributed 109,000 hours valued at \$18 million for LegalHealth clients.*

# Hope

“When I was diagnosed with cervical cancer, I had to stop working as a housekeeper. The stress of coping while trying to stay afloat financially triggered severe anxiety and depression. I was close to being evicted. Things changed when my social worker at the hospital sent me to meet LegalHealth lawyer, Julie. Thanks to her, I got retroactive and ongoing monthly benefits – and was able to stay in my apartment. That I could meet her at the hospital and speak to her in Russian, my native language, made the difference of my seeking help or not. I could not have done this on my own.”



Eugenia Zabinska

LegalHealth Client | Patient, Maimonides Medical Center

*Over one-fifth of LegalHealth's clients are cancer patients.*



# *Trust*

“LegalHealth does not just solve individual complicated legal issues. They become vital members of the healthcare team; they educate providers and healthcare administrators on the intersection of medicine and law to address both the clinical and social determinants of health. They are role models on how to develop effective and sustainable medical-legal partnerships and we’re proud to support their work.”

Julio Urbina &  
Lauren Weisenfeld

The Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation

*LegalHealth has been a model for sustainable medical-legal partnerships across the country.*

# Reach

“The connection between the health of a community and that community’s access to justice are becoming increasingly evident. For the last 15 years, LegalHealth has been at the forefront of a movement to align health and civil legal aid services to better ensure healthy, equitable communities. By partnering with 26 hospitals and health centers, they are not only changing the way people in New York City receive care, but are advancing the national conversation about what quality care really means.”



Ellen Lawton

Director

National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership  
at George Washington University

*Medical-legal partnerships have been established in 294 healthcare institutions in 41 states across the country.*



# Impact

“When I was injured in a mortar blast in Iraq, I never thought I would be denied disability benefits. Having Keith as my LegalHealth lawyer made all the difference. He represented me in fighting for the benefits I deserve, negotiating with my insurance company, and applying for the Purple Heart I earned in the Army. LegalHealth increased my income and petitioned for an important acknowledgement of my sacrifice.”

**Thien Chung**

Specialist, United States Army  
LegalHealth Client | Patient, Bronx VA Hospital

*Legal services are among the top unmet needs of veterans. LegalHealth has handled 4,489 cases for 2,991 veterans.*

# Ally

“As a social worker, I provide crisis intervention therapy to patients suffering from physical and emotional abuse. Our patients have suffered substantial harm and trauma and are often isolated from society. To be able to refer clients on-site where they can meet with an attorney and be educated, empowered and represented in family court and before immigration tribunals is an important step toward rebuilding their lives. By combining medical and behavioral health treatment with legal care our patients have better success with their treatment and improved stability through work authorization, health insurance, family reunifications, and lawful immigration status.”



## Claudia Alacan, LMSW

Domestic and Other Violence Emergencies Program  
New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center

*Over the last five years, LegalHealth has conducted 250 trainings for members of healthcare teams across New York City.*

# Randye Retkin

Director  
LegalHealth



## *Innovation*

“Healthcare reform in New York State is an exciting time for medical-legal partnerships. We have been involved in many new healthcare delivery models. The most important is the State’s current effort to redesign Medicaid, which includes an emphasis on addressing the social determinants of health. Medical-legal partnerships like LegalHealth have an important role to play.”



# Beth Breslin

DSRIP Policy Associate  
LegalHealth

*New York State’s Medicaid reform efforts seek to bring medical and social service organizations together to improve care and reduce costs.*

# Inspiration

“Interning at LegalHealth has opened my eyes to how the law – and my education – can translate into a viable avenue for justice. When a homebound client gave me and my supervisor a tour of her tiny apartment, pointing out all the repairs the landlord had refused to do, I realized that the law is far more than lofty, abstract ideas. It is a concrete tool that I can use to empower others to pursue their rights as human beings.”



**Caroline Roe**

3rd Year Law Student  
Brooklyn Law School

*Over 150 law students from schools around the country have interned or volunteered with LegalHealth.*

## LEGALHEALTH FUNDERS PAST & PRESENT

Avon Foundation for Women  
American Cancer Society, Eastern Division  
Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation  
Charles Evan Hughes Memorial Foundation  
Disabled American Veterans Charitable Service Trust  
Equal Justice Works  
The Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation  
Harry S. Black & Allon Fuller Fund  
The Jacob & Valeria Langeloth Foundation  
J.E. & Z.B. Butler Foundation  
Linda Rogers Emory  
Livestrong Foundation  
Long Island Community Foundation  
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, ActionNYC  
New York City Council  
The New York Community Trust  
New York State Department of Health  
New York State Health Foundation  
New York State Interest on Lawyer Account Fund  
New York Women's Foundation  
Office of Court Administration  
Pfizer  
The Robin Hood Foundation  
Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation  
Single Stop USA  
Susan G. Komen Greater NYC  
The Spingold Foundation, Inc.  
United Hospital Fund  
The Y.C. Ho & Michael Chiang Foundation  
Our Hospital and Other Partners

15 Years

*15 Voices*

is dedicated to the partners, funders, staff  
and clients – past and present – who have made  
LegalHealth a model for the country.

LegalHealth

**N<sup>Y</sup>LAG**  
NEW YORK LEGAL ASSISTANCE GROUP

7 Hanover Square, 18th Floor, New York, NY 10004 | (212) 613-5000  
[www.legalhealth.org](http://www.legalhealth.org) | [www.nylag.org](http://www.nylag.org)