The Cancer Legal Resource Center: Helping People Navigate Cancer-Related Legal Issues

Editor's Note: This is part of a series of Patient Advocate Guest Columns and Podcasts, launched as a forum for patient advocates to address a topic, issue, or trend within the cancer community through Cancer.Net, the patient information website of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO).

The Cancer Legal Resource Center: Helping People Navigate Cancer-Related Legal Issues

A patient advocate guest column by Monica Fawzy Bryant, Esq., Staff Attorney, Cancer Legal Resource Center (www.CancerLegalResourceCenter.org[1]).

Many cancer survivors and caregivers are surprised to discover that battling cancer involves more than just physically beating the disease. The Cancer Legal Resource Center (CLRC) is a national, joint program of the Disability Rights Legal Center and Loyola Law School Los Angeles. The CLRC provides free and confidential information and resources on cancer-related legal issues to cancer patients, survivors, caregivers, health care professionals, employers, and others coping with cancer.

A cancer diagnosis can drop individuals into a maze of unfamiliar and complicated issues including: getting and keeping health, disability, and life insurance; access to quality care; government benefits (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare, and unemployment); retaining and obtaining employment; taking time off work; managing the financial impact of cancer care; and estate planning. These issues can cause people unnecessary confusion and stress, and can be overwhelming. When these legal issues are not addressed, people may find that although they have made it through treatment, they have lost their homes, jobs, or insurance coverage.

Where to turn for help

Since 1997, the CLRC has helped over 165,000 people nationally, through their Telephone Assistance Line, Cancer Rights Conferences, outreach programs, educational seminars, workshops, and other community activities. Last year alone, CLRC assisted over 27,000 people through national telephone services and educational activities in the cancer community.

All of CLRC's services are national, free, confidential, and are available in English [2] and Spanish [3]. Services are provided in additional languages through CLRC community partners and a language line.

Telephone Assistance Line

One way that the CLRC assists people coping with cancer is the toll-free, national Telephone Assistance Line, through which callers from across the country can obtain free, confidential information and resources relevant to their specific situation. In addition to receiving calls from patients, survivors and caregivers, CLRC receives calls from community advocates and health care providers calling on behalf of patients. People may reach the CLRC assistance line at 866-THE-CLRC or 866-843-2572.

Education and Outreach

The CLRC offers free educational seminars on topics such as:

- employment and taking time off work

- health, disability, and life insurance options
- access to healthcare
- government benefits
- insurance navigation
- genetics and the law
- estate planning
- advanced healthcare directives
- consumer rights
- education rights of children and young adults with cancer
- understanding health care reform

The CLRC also provides online resources, including educational materials and seminars on national and state-specific topics. In addition, CLRC staff members travel around the country to speak at seminars and attend outreach events in the cancer community. Topics can be customized for any audience.

Cancer Rights Conferences

The CLRC presents several national Cancer Rights Conferences [4] throughout the year. These free conferences provide people coping with cancer, caregivers, advocates, attorneys, and healthcare professionals with information about cancer-related legal issues. The CLRC hopes to provide continuing education units to nurses, social workers, and attorneys who attend CLRC conferences. For more information on CLRC conferences, visit www.CancerRightsConference.org [4].

Professional Panel

The CLRC is focused on providing education and self-advocacy tools, which is often the most effective means to help people solve their issues; however, callers do occasionally need additional one-on-one assistance from various professionals. The Professional Panel is group of volunteer attorneys, insurance agents, accountants, and other professionals who are willing to provide additional assistance to people in need of help.

To contact the Cancer Legal Resource Center, visit www.CancerLegalResourceCenter.org [1] or call (866) 843-2572.

If you are a patient advocate interested in authoring a future Patient Advocate Guest Column or Podcast, please contact patientadvocates@asco.org [5] or 571-483-1358.

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Last Updated: March 14, 2011

Links:
[1] http://www.CancerLegalResourceCenter.org
[2] http://www.cancerlegalresourcecenter.org/
[3] https://www.disabilityrightslegalcenter.org/about/CLRCEspanol.cfm
[4] http://www.CancerRightsConference.org
[5] mailto:patientadvocates@asco.org