



## **Lawyers and Doctors Partner to Help Low Income, Seriously Ill New Yorkers**

**New York, July 23, 2003 /U.S. Newswire/** LegalHealth™, a program of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), today announced that more than 1,000 New York City medical professionals and social workers have been successfully trained on how to identify and assist with the legal issues affecting chronically ill, low income patients.

Doctors and social workers are often frustrated by the limitations of simply treating an ailment. What good is it to send an asthmatic child back to an apartment with roaches, rodents and mold? What can they tell a cancer patient to do about the credit agency demanding payment for medical bills?

"The legal issues that arise from a serious illness are vast," said LegalHealth Director Randye Retkin. "By bringing lawyers, doctors and social workers together, LegalHealth is the triumvirate needed to combat the legal issues that can negatively affect good health."

Founded in September 2001 as a unit of NYLAG, a not-for-profit law office that has been providing free civil legal services to low income New Yorkers since 1990, LegalHealth was the first and only established staff-driven program in New York City addressing the complex legal needs of people with chronic illness (other than HIV/AIDS). Since then, LegalHealth has educated more than 1,000 healthcare providers through an innovative training curriculum covering over 25 areas of law. Courses range from basic introductions to the legal issues confronting patients including public benefits, the New York City shelter system, immigration and child support, to detailed workshops on how to advocate for habitable housing conditions or for a child with special education needs.

In addition to helping medical professionals and social workers better understand the legal rights and needs of patients, LegalHealth provides direct assistance to low income New Yorkers by holding legal clinics at six hospitals and numerous community based health organizations throughout New York City. LegalHealth attorneys are able to assist clients with the full range of issues that can stem from illness, including access to healthcare, debtor/creditor issues, employment issues, food stamp and Medicaid applications and end of life planning.

"Now that St. Luke's-Roosevelt and LegalHealth are working together, we're more able to help the patients who have legal issues impacting their health status," said Dr. Peter Tesler, Medical Director of Ambulatory Care at St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospital. "Legal education enables hospital staff to be more effective advocates for our patients, and the on-site legal clinic gives us a place to refer patients with legal problems ranging from

asthma-inducing housing conditions to parents seeking special education services for their children.”

“By teaming with the hospitals and community organizations that see patients on a regular basis and training medical professionals and advocates on patients’ rights and how to advocate for them, LegalHealth is helping to reduce the poverty issues that threaten health,” said Ms. Retkin. “A thousand is just the beginning.”

### **About NYLAG**

Founded in 1990, the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) is a not-for-profit law office providing free civil legal services to low income New Yorkers. A full service agency, NYLAG offers comprehensive assistance to clients with more than one legal issue. NYLAG provides direct legal services, advocacy through impact litigation, consultation, and numerous volunteer and pro bono opportunities. Last year, NYLAG handled 19,993 cases and benefited additional thousands through successful impact litigation and community legal education. For more information on NYLAG, go to [www.nylag.org](http://www.nylag.org).

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