

Amira Hasenbush

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July 30, 2010

Dan Ruben, Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road, Building II, Suite 204  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

It has been a privilege to work as an intern at the HIV & AIDS Legal Services Alliance (HASLA) this summer. I primarily worked on helping HASLA to start a medical-legal partnership (MLP) pilot project. I conducted informational interviews and did extensive research of existing MLPs throughout the United States and specifically in Los Angeles to learn about their structure, funding and evaluation. I also researched different legal, medical, HIV/AIDS and LGBT nonprofit organizations throughout Los Angeles to learn more about services available and lacking for underserved communities with chronic diseases, and to explore potential partnerships. My co-intern and I put together a pilot proposal that explained and promoted the MLP model to potential partners. Also, I began to research and contact potential academic partners to help develop and execute evaluation of the future pilots.

I conducted several informational interviews with different medical and legal participants in a currently active medical-legal partnership (MLP), with only the intention of learning more about how they ran their program. Like many other MLPs that I had interviewed, I was impressed with the positive feedback that everyone gave about the program as a whole: it increased communication between practitioners who do not usually have professional relationships, it helped people to realize that there are many different ways to help underserved individuals, but most importantly, it improved the lives of the individuals with whom they worked on a greater scale and in a more efficient manner than they had ever been able to execute individually without the partnership. However, this partnership was in fact so passionate and positive about the work that they had going that they actually actively encouraged me to go back to my organization and advise the board that they were interested in expanding their work and would like to partner with us as well! While most of the time, I found myself explaining the MLP model to somewhat skeptical executives, it always struck me that anyone with any experience with an MLP was not only on board with the idea, but was incredibly enthusiastic in spreading the word and increasing services to its constituents.

This summer has not only been an opportunity for me to serve an organization whose work I truly believe in, but it has also been an incredible learning experience. Thank you so much for supporting my career as well as the work of a truly wonderful organization.

Sincerely,



Amira Hasenbush  
JD/MPH Candidate, Class of 2013  
UCLA School of Law and School of Public Health



HIV & AIDS Legal  
Services Alliance

August 20, 2010

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road, Building II, Suite 204  
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RE: Evaluation of Amira Hasenbush's Equal Justice America Fellowship at  
HALSA

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer, Amira used her Equal Justice America Fellowship to work at HALSA (HIV/AIDS Legal Services Alliance, Inc.). She handled a very special project for us – researching and helping to design a medical-legal partnership pilot project that would expand HALSA's outreach and legal services to people with other chronic conditions. I was one of Amira's supervising attorneys for this project: I am a law professor at Loyola Law School, and a board member and volunteer attorney with HALSA. I can say unequivocally that Amira was invaluable and far exceeded my expectations. The other supervising attorney and the Executive Director feel the same way.

First, a word about HALSA: Despite medical advances that have improved the lives of many people with HIV/AIDS, too many people cannot get this care or may not have consistent access to medical treatment because of social and economic factors that directly and indirectly affect health ("social determinants of health"). HALSA uses its legal tools to combat many of these social determinants of health, such as discrimination, lack of health benefits, homelessness or threats to housing, and immigration-related barriers. HALSA wants to build upon this link between legal services and health by establishing a medical-legal partnership (MLP) that will expand HALSA's reach. MLP's embed attorneys in medical facilities and partner with medical providers to combat social determinants of health at an earlier stage than is possible under the more traditional poverty legal services delivery model. Depending on the site of the MLP, HALSA would also expand its services to patients suffering from other chronic conditions, besides HIV/AIDS.

Amira was assigned to primarily work on this MLP project. She worked with another intern, a first year student at UC Irvine law school with an MD. Amira's public health interest merged beautifully with the other intern's medical background, and both seemed incredibly enthused about the project. They not only got along well, but they also figured out very quickly how they complimented each other on a professional level, and used this very effectively.

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Initially both interns were tasked with researching Medical-Legal Partnerships to help us determine: (i) the need for MLPs in Los Angeles; (ii) how well existing MLPs are meeting this need; (iii) legal concerns/issues that can arise when a medical-legal team is formed; and (iv) ideas for the best approach for HALSA to establish its own MLP project. The following is an illustrative list of the topics Amira researched:

- Models of MLPs in Los Angeles and nationwide.
- Social and legal needs of Los Angeles patients and possible medical partners.
- Existing studies and articles on the medical, justice, and financial benefits of MLPs for patients, as well as the financial savings it can provide host institutions.
- Local, state, and federal legislative developments encouraging or supporting MLPs.
- Legal research about confidentiality concerns/questions that can arise in the medical-legal partnership context.

Amira was a very proactive and indispensable part of this process. She kept in touch regularly with new information, results of research, and questions about follow-up; indeed Amira turned around every assignment much faster than expected. In addition, Amira provided suggested agendas for our weekly meetings, and helped us establish concrete goals and a timeline for launching the pilot. Amira's research was interdisciplinary, and she used electronic, as well as phone and in-person interviews to gather information. She interviewed attorneys, social service providers, and medical personnel, and then recorded and presented the information for us each week. She even took her research a step further, by arranging for us to meet with another legal services provider doing similar work but in a different subject area. This meeting not only generated incredibly useful information that may help us launch our pilot soon, but it might also result in a joint project with that legal services provider.

I found Amira's maturity, independence and creativity particularly refreshing. She did not just gather and synthesize information for the rest of us. She thought critically about HALSA's existing capability and client base, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of existing MLPs models that she could discern from her research. Based on this information, Amira came up her own very sensible proposals for how to proceed (i.e. which medical providers to form partnerships with, the kind of legal service delivery model to use). Amira consistently showed excellent judgment in terms of the kind of questions she asked and solutions she proposed. It was clear that the people Amira interviewed were equally impressed.

Finally, I want to emphasize that HALSA has benefitted tremendously from Amira's work, which culminated in a pilot proposal that she and the other intern authored and designed. This proposal essentially explains the principles and practical aspects of how a medical legal partnership works in a way that is compelling and doctor-friendly. It explains the benefits of MLPs for patients and medical providers using case examples and recent studies, while clarifying how more technical issues will be handled, such as

confidentiality and scheduling. The quality of this product is excellent – from the substance, organization, tone, and writing – relatively little editing was required. HALSA will use this proposal in its meetings with medical providers and potential funders.

The bottom-line is that Amira's public health commitment, thorough research and innovative spirit have helped to propel HALSA toward an important goal –one that should benefit many more patients in Los Angeles. I cannot speak highly enough about Amira's contribution toward this goal.

Very truly yours,

Brietta Clark  
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