

The Cancer Legal Resource Center: A Tool for Oncology Professionals

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A cancer diagnosis raises a myriad of medical questions for a patient. Patients and health-care professionals work together to address these medical questions and treatment decisions. However, in addition to the medical decisions, cancer also raises many other considerations and concerns. These can include emotional, psychosocial, financial, and legal issues. Services that help to relieve the emotional stress of cancer are effective methods of providing support to the whole cancer patient (Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2007).

The Cancer Legal Resource Center (CLRC) is a nonprofit organization that specifically addresses cancer-related legal concerns. The mission of the CLRC is to provide information and resources on cancer-related legal issues to cancer patients, survivors, caregivers, health-care professionals, employers, and others affected by cancer. The CLRC is a national, joint program of the Disability Rights Legal Center and Loyola Law School Los Angeles. All services provided by the CLRC are free and confidential. Services are available in English and Spanish; in addition, the organization works with community partners to provide services for speakers of other languages.

Education Model

The CLRC is based on an education model rather than a litigation model. It is typically more effective to resolve an issue by navigating through the system rather than filing for litigation. Therefore, the CLRC educates individuals about laws that may apply to their situations so that they can advocate for themselves. This may help resolve the issue quickly, rather than years later when a case

may go to trial. Additionally, the CLRC believes that the quality of outcomes for patient survivorship improve when information regarding cancer-related legal issues is easily accessible.

Through this education model, the CLRC offers three parts to its program. First, the CLRC provides a national education and outreach program on cancer-related legal issues. In 2010, the CLRC reached over 23,000 people through seminars, cancer community events, professional meetings, in-service trainings, and national Cancer Rights Conferences. In 2011, the CLRC will hold three national conferences in Chicago, Washington, DC, and Ann Arbor.

Second, the CLRC hosts a national Telephone Assistance Line: 866-THE-CLRC. Through this service, the CLRC provides free information on the laws that may apply to a caller's situation and resources for taking next steps. In 2010, the CLRC assisted over 4,200 individuals from across the United States. Additionally, if necessary, the CLRC refers callers to a professional panel of attorneys, accountants, and insurance agents who may be able to assist further.

Third, the CLRC offers educational materials and resources on its website to help cancer patients, health-care professionals, and ad-

CLRC by the Numbers

231,000

People reached by the CLRC since 1997

50,100

Online resources downloaded from the CLRC in 2009–2010

37,500

Callers to the CLRC's national Telephone Assistance Line

1,490

Community events attended by the CLRC since 1997

5

National Cancer Rights conferences hosted by the CLRC

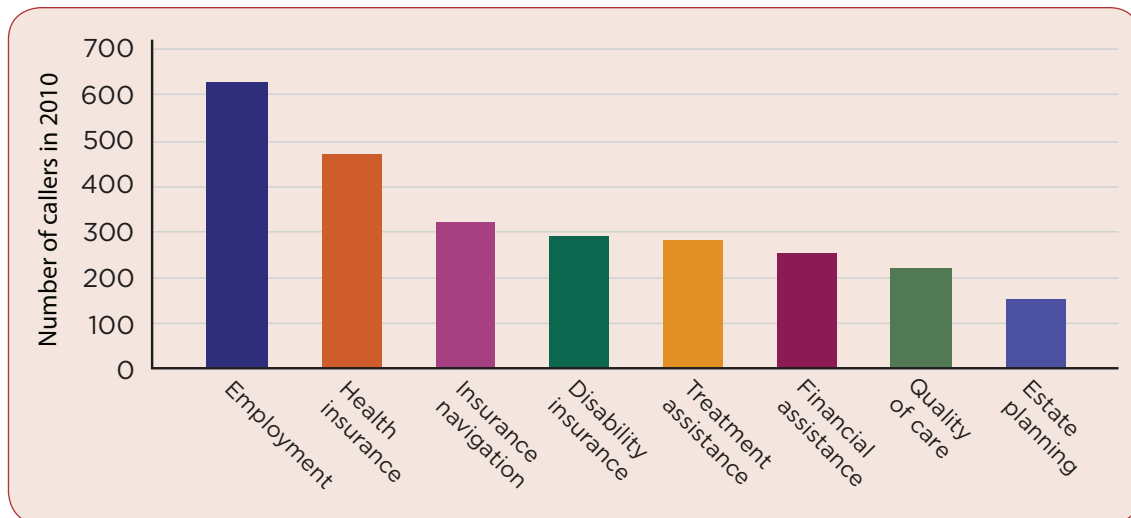


Figure 1. Top eight legal issues that the CLRC received calls about in 2010.

vocates navigate important cancer-related legal issues. Through a generous grant from **LIVESTRONG**, the CLRC has created “The HCP Manual: A Legal Resource Guide for Oncology Health Care Professionals.” This manual serves as a desk reference for health-care professionals whose patients are facing cancer-related legal concerns. Over 10,000 individuals have viewed this publication on the CLRC website since April 2010.

Cancer-Related Legal Issues

The CLRC receives requests for assistance regarding a variety of cancer-related issues. Some people are surprised about the breadth of cancer-related concerns that are legal in nature. For example, laws are in place to protect individuals from discrimination, provide health insurance coverage, create government benefits, provide consumer protections, and provide funding for cancer screening, treatment, and research.

The CLRC provides infor-

mation and resources about laws relating to the following topics:

- Health insurance
- Employment
- Disability insurance
- Life insurance
- Government benefits
- Estate planning
- Landlord/tenant
- Financial resources
- Custody/guardianship of minor children
- Real estate
- Family law
- Immigration
- Toxic torts
- Genetic discrimination
- Consumer law

While the CLRC has resources in many different areas, there are several issue areas that come up more often than others. Figure 1 depicts the top eight legal issues that the CLRC received calls about in 2010. The two most common issues are getting and keeping health insurance and employment. Other common inquiries

are related to disability insurance and insurance navigation.

Using the CLRC in Practice

An advanced practitioner is often one of the first people that a patient turns to with questions and concerns about a cancer diagnosis. Many of these concerns may, in fact, be legal in nature. For example, imagine a patient who has just learned that she needs to undergo chemotherapy and radiation, and that she will likely need to take time off to recuperate. The patient may be concerned about losing her job and her health insurance if she takes too much time off from work.

In this situation, the first resource an advanced practitioner can turn to is the HCP



Use your smartphone to access the Cancer Legal Resource Center's website.

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Manual. This manual has chapters on taking time off from work, getting and keeping health insurance, and other important topics for this particular cancer patient. If the patient has more specific questions, the advanced practitioner can refer her to the CLRC's national Telephone Assistance Line or call the telephone line on behalf of the patient.

Summary

When a patient receives a diagnosis of cancer, he or she

is almost certain to have a long list of questions and concerns. As outlined in this article, the Cancer Legal Resource Center is an organization that provides free cancer-related legal information and resources to cancer patients, survivors, caregivers, and health-care professionals. The CLRC welcomes questions from patients as well as nurses and other health-care professionals. Individuals can call the Telephone Assistance Line at 866-THE-CLRC or visit the

organization's website at www.CancerLegalResourceCenter.org for more information.

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REFERENCES

- Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. (2007). Cancer care for the whole patient: Meeting psychosocial health needs. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://iom.edu/Reports/2007/Cancer-Care-for-the-Whole-Patient-Meeting-Psychosocial-Health-Needs.aspx>