

HOW A LEGAL NURSE CONSULTANT CAN HELP WITH YOUR CASE

By Pauline Sanders, LNC

A LEGAL NURSE CONSULTANT (LNC) IS A REGISTERED NURSE WHO USES EXPERTISE AS A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER AND SPECIAIZED TRAINING TO CONSULT ON MEDICAL-RELATED LEGAL CASES. The legal nurse profession is rapidly growing throughout the world: The American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants (AALNC) celebrated its 20th year as a recognized profession and national association in 2009. Members of the AALNC work for the legal profession in various roles to compliment the attorneys' case work.

There are similarities in the skills required to be a nurse and investigative analysis required to resolve a legal case. A registered nurse who becomes a legal nurse consultant is expanding on a career that is already based on investigations, and research that clinically assist physicians and health care professionals with properly diagnosing patients. LNCs use what they have learned and experienced in the nursing profession to review legal cases and identify any breakdowns in patient care.

LNCs assist attorneys with winning their medical malpractice cases, providing thorough (and affordable) review of medical documents. The LNC may review a medical malpractice case for tort, review a product liability case for equipment defects, or review a personal injury case to determine if there has been a breach in the standard of care that resulted in subsequent harm to the patient.

LNCs analyze personal injury cases, workers' compensation cases, and elder abuse cases; assist with reconstruction of events; and write case analysis reports. LNCs play a major role in education the legal team about day-to-day routines in the medical world.

An LNC may perform such tasks as:

- Attend insurance medical exams (IMEs)
- Perform client interviews/education
- Attend dispositions
- Develop chronologies
- Identify staff from the medical team to depose
- Identify missing medical records
- Identify pertinent policies and procedures to subpoena

A LNC may be utilized as an expert witness by the plaintiff for the defense. The expert witness can explain the standard of care, elaborate on the breach in the respective case, and educate the legal team and the jury on the reasonable treatment that should have occurred. The ideal expert nurse witness is an LNC with specialization in the area of expertise and recent experience, as well as experience testifying for both the plaintiff and defense sides.

LNCs find attorneys a refreshing group of professionals to work with because they tend to have a great deal of respect for the LNC's talents. The LNC may work with counsel as an in-house employee or as an

an independent contractor. LNCs also work as risk managers in hospitals, as case managers in the insurance industry, and as life care planners.

One may question the difference between a physician and a nurse analyzing a legal case. The physician is definitely the expert in his area of practice. The registered nurse, however, is also trained to handle any type of ill patient, whether be a child, pregnant female, heart attack victim, or elderly cancer patient who just suffered a stroke.

As much as we would all like to believe that the health care profession is safe and perfect, medical errors do happen. An LNC knows how to navigate the health care system and identify safe practices for patients to determine if the case in question has merit. For nearly 20 years, legal nurse consultants have served as liaisons between the medical and legal disciplines, as unique and valuable members of the litigation team. Let us help you win your next case..

PAULINE SANDERS is a Certified Legal Nurse Consultant (CLNC) with more than 20 years of health care experience. To learn more about Ms. Sanders and the American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants, please visit www.aalnc.org, www.bacnc.org, and www.sanders-associates.com.

Published by the Alameda County Bar Association www.acbanet.org