

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**LORETTO HOSPITAL INTEGRATES MEDICAL-LEGAL SERVICES INTO
OVERALL HEALTHCARE STRATEGY TO HELP PATIENTS WARD OFF
SICK BUILDING SYNDROME**

Helping to build healthy communities through better standards, better care and better outcomes

CHICAGO, IL – (November 9, 2015) – Loretto Hospital and PCC Community Wellness Center (PCC) has partnered with the Lawyers’ Committee for Better Housing (LCBH), a nonprofit law firm and community-based housing organization that integrates legal representation and advocacy into a patient’s medical treatment program, to form a Medical-Legal Partnership (“MLP”) called *Healthy Housing Chicago*.

The goal of *Healthy Housing Chicago* is to address and resolve health-harming living/housing conditions and challenges that are impacting Loretto Hospital and PCC patients. Such conditions include, but are not limited to: bed bugs, mold, lead paint, and utility shut off.

Recent reports by Leapfrog Group, Washington, D.C. that rates hospitals nationwide to help steer healthcare workers towards providing a higher quality health care, has Loretto now ranking as a top provider of quality of care, especially in areas of safety, with its recent grade of ‘A’ on October 28, 2015. The new partnership is another strategy by Loretto and its overall safety practices to continue offering exemplary care and treatment in a safe, holistic environment to its patients.

Although the City of Chicago has established building ordinances to penalize landlords who fail to provide safe and nonhazardous living conditions for tenants, there still exists buildings that cause a number of health issues for tenants living in them. The alliance with LCBH will extend free legal and support services to Loretto patients whose medical condition may be the result of renting an unhealthy apartment or home that is contributing to the patient’s health issues.

“Collaborating with Loretto Hospital just makes perfect sense because the location of the hospital provides easy access for patients who may be in need of attorney assistance or representation but cannot access legal services located in the Loop,” said Kira Wilpone-Welborn, a medical-legal partnership fellow and on-site attorney at Loretto Hospital.

According to a recent report by the Environmental Protection Agency, indoor air pollutants can cause a host of acute illnesses and/or minor health symptoms that can mimic the common flu or allergies, and are sometimes categorized as sick building syndrome. Indoor pollutants such as: mold; lead-based paint; pest infestations; the presence of asbestos in insulation; glue in carpet or ceiling and floor molding; lead in plumbing fixtures and formaldehyde in paneling or cabinets, are some of the hazards that can be linked to rhinitis, nasal congestion, recurring asthma symptoms, cough, headaches, dizziness, skin rashes, fever and even severe lung disease.

“Many renters may be unsuspecting victims of medical problems, for instance recurring asthma attacks can be caused by conditions in their home. So when a patient keeps coming to see the doctor for their asthma, and no matter how many new inhalers the doctor prescribes, when they go home the issue will reoccur. So we have to hold landlords accountable to rectify the problems within the property that are causing tenants to become ill,” Wilpone-Welborn said.

There are approximately 20 hospitals or healthcare organizations in Illinois that participate in the free medical-legal partnership program. In addition to receiving free legal services, Loretto Hospital patients will have full access to all of LCBH’s programs and services which include: Eviction Defense Program, legal representation to renters facing eviction, including many elderly, disabled, or single mothers; Affordable Housing Preservation Program (AHPP), for individuals living in buildings with building code violations; the Tenant Advocacy Project (TAP), provides pre-eviction assistance to renters whose utilities have been illegally shut off, have been locked out of their homes by the landlord, or experienced other serious life-threatening issues; the Tenants in Foreclosure Intervention Project (TFIP); and the Fair Housing Project (FH) of LCBH.

According to Wilpone-Welborn, even when tenants face an eviction, it may be the result of a medical issue. “Sometimes people have to choose between buying their medication opposed to paying their rent or utilities. So our overall goal is to ensure that patients have the civil legal help they need.”

For more information about Loretto Hospital, its medical services and its new patient legal services, contact Tanesha Daniels, Chief Experience Officer, at 773-854-5095.

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About Loretto Hospital

Loretto Hospital is a not-for-profit, community-based hospital located in Austin, the largest community in Chicago. Loretto is the only hospital in the Austin community and is the largest non-government employer in the Austin community. The hospital has more than 600 staff, comprising of 170 physicians and 300 nursing professionals. Although the largest percentage of the hospital's patients resides in Austin and Garfield Park, neighboring suburban communities also utilize Loretto as a healthcare resource. For more information, please visit www.lorettohospital.org.