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Nurses forming legal partnerships to meet the needs of the underserved in rural America

The American Bar Association, the formation of the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnerships at George Washington University in Washington, DC and the American Academy of Pediatrics formed the first medical-legal partnership in 2007. Joint resolutions were passed for members to become partners with the other professional colleagues to “address the legal and social issues affecting patient health and well-being.” The American Bar Association resolution led to the creation of the Medical-Legal Partnership Pro Bono Project. In 2015, the East Tennessee State University College of Nursing was awarded a small grant from the National Nurses Consortium to participate in the development of a medical-legal partnership. The Nurse-Led Community Health Center is staffed by Nurse Practitioners who provides health care for the underserved in northeast Tennessee. The patients are diverse and include homeless, migrants, residents of public housing, uninsured, and underinsured. The first need was to identify a legal partner. The Health Center had met staff from the Tennessee Justice Center at a training session and approached them about partnering with them. However, their office is five hours driving time from the Health Center. The team became creative in using technology to link to their partner for the needed services. The team focused on meeting the needs of children as no child in Tennessee should be without insurance. Through the partnership with the Tennessee Justice Center and the Health Center eliminated barriers not only children but all patients facing healthcare access across the state.

Biography

Patricia M Vanhook is an Associate Professor and Associate Dean for Practice and Community Partnerships at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) College of Nursing in Johnson City, Tennessee. She became a Board Certified Family Nurse Practitioner by the American Nurses Credentialing Center in 1994. She joined East Tennessee State University College of Nursing as an Assistant Professor in August of 2006. In 2008, she became the Director of Practice serving as the College of Nursing Leader for five of the nurse-managed clinics and resource for the College of Nursing Federally Qualified Community Health Centres Clinics. She assumed the role of Associate Dean for Practice and Community Partnerships in July 2009. In this role she has facilitated the expansion of the nurse-led clinics from five to 14 sites through local, state, and federal grants exceeding \$22 million in funding. Under her leadership, the nurse-led community health center clinics were recognized by the Bureau of Primary Health Care in 2014 as a National Quality Leader for their quality of care outcomes. She serves on the National Nursing-Led Nursing Centres Consortium Board, the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnerships Advisory Council, and the Rural Health Association of Tennessee Board. She was recognized as East Tennessee State University Notable Woman for 2016 for her contributions to nurse-led care. She is a Member of the Tennessee Nurses Association, American Nurses Association, American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

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