

## The Tanya Project: a Medical-Legal Partnership for People with Breast or Gynecological Cancer

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**I. Summary:** Free legal advice and referral is a crucial but unmet need for many diagnosed with breast and gynecological cancers. The Tanya Project provides free lawyers to help our clients win health insurance appeals, obtain/retain Medicaid/Medicare, draft end-of-life documents, and avoid discrimination on the basis of their cancer status and/or cancer history. Clients with other legal needs are referred to free/low cost legal service providers, or the Tanya Project's trained Oncology Attorney Referral Panel.

Studies show that hospitals that participate in Medical-Legal Partnerships for people with cancer make \$16 for every dollar paid to lawyers, because the lawyers appeal health insurance coverage denials and help patients enroll in Medicaid -- thereby unblocking payments hospitals would never otherwise receive, and freeing up oncology staff time.<sup>1</sup>

**II. Medical-Legal Partnerships:** The Tanya Project is a Medical-Legal Partnership. MLPs have been successfully used across the nation to provide holistic and coordinated services to patients by training healthcare providers to spot legal issues and refer patients to attorney-colleagues. The Tanya Project is the San Francisco Bay area's only MLP that addresses the needs of people with cancer. A survey of patients served by a MLP program for people with cancer in New York City found that:

- 75% of patients interviewed said legal assistance reduced stress,
- 50% stated that legal assistance they received also benefited their families,
- 45% reported that legal assistance improved their financial position, and
- 30% said legal assistance helped them adhere to their medical treatment and not miss medical appointments.<sup>2</sup>

### **III. The Tanya Project's Free Services:**

#### A. Educational Workshops:

*For Healthcare Providers:* Free educational workshops teach oncology staff about the success of the MLP model, how to screen for common legal problems, and encourages them to refer patients who need free legal advice to our Supervising Attorney.

*For People With Cancer:* Free educational workshops on a variety of topics are offered at treatment centers and nonprofits that serve people with cancer, including how to obtain/maintain health insurance (especially Medicaid), how to write Advance Health Care Directives and POLSTs, and how to request reasonable accommodations to return to work and/or maintain housing.

B. Group Legal Clinics: Free on-site classes at treatment centers and nonprofits that serve people with cancer enable one attorney to help a small group of clients write simple legal documents, such as Durable Powers of Attorney and simple wills.

C. Brief Service: Free consultations by telephone enable our clients to get individualized legal advice without having to travel to the attorney. Because cancer patients are often on pain medications and unable to take notes, upon the caller's request, each consult is followed by a legal opinion letter or email which summarizes the advice and legal strategy offered, provides citations to relevant laws, and includes self-help materials and free/low-cost referrals for further assistance.

D. Legal Referrals: Women who need extensive individual representation or help with areas of law not covered by our free attorneys are referred to free/low-cost legal service providers, and/or to our trained Oncology Attorney Referral Panel.

E. Self-Help Legal Publications: Our website (launching in early 2017) will contain a wealth of "know your rights" materials, as well as basic templates users can download to create simple legal documents, including Advance Health Care Directives, Physicians Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment, Durable Powers of Attorney, requests for reasonable accommodation in employment and housing, tips for appealing a health insurance treatment/drug denial, and more. Our publications include information about both federal and California state law, so are relevant to users nationwide.

**IV. Michele Magar's Bio:** Our Supervising Attorney is a San Francisco-based lawyer and journalist with two specialties: advancing the civil and human rights of people with disabilities, and fair housing (for all protected classes). Before graduating from Stanford Law School in 1995, Michele worked for 14 years as an award-winning investigative reporter covering civil rights, and became the first national news reporter to specialize in disability rights coverage during her tenure at National Public Radio. More recently, she traveled to the United Nations to help draft and lobby for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (which has since been ratified by more than 165 nations), and then (without funding) organized the first Congressional briefing on the new treaty. Michele is proud to be a former staff attorney with Bay Area Legal Aid and Disability Rights California. She uses a mix of law, journalism, publicity, coalition building, legislative advocacy, public education, and community organizing to protect and advance civil and human rights. Michele has native fluency in French and is proficient in Spanish. Contact Michele at TanyaProjectMLP@gmail.com or 415.793.4144 (cell).

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<sup>1</sup> The Cancer Cliff, 2015. Available at: <http://nylag.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/NCLSN-White-Paper-FINAL-8.6.15.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Id.