Students Help Secure Coverage for Bone Marrow Transplant

Sarah McDonough, a 32-year-old single mother, had been receiving treatment since September 2008 for a rare form of life-threatening cancer. When her doctors recommended a bone-marrow transplant at Boston’s Dana-Farber Cancer Institute—calling it her “last best hope for treatment”—Fidelis Care denied the request.

With the help of three students, under the direction of Joe Connors, the director of the Law Clinic & Justice Center, the decision was appealed. The N.Y. State Dept of Health ruled that Fidelis must cover her treatment at the Boston facility.

At issue was the location, said Connors. Fidelis wanted her to use an in-network provider, located in Buffalo or New York City. But Ms. McDonough was deep into chemotherapy to prepare for the transplant, and feeling pretty terrible. She has family in Boston, where her 7- and 9-year-olds could stay during the month-long treatment. “She had no one in New York, and had no way to get there given her health,” said Connors. “She would have had to begin testing from the start. She was zapping her energy fighting Fidelis and the stress that comes with those conflicts.”

As a result of the Health Law Clinic’s hearing advocacy, the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance directed Fidelis to provide coverage for Ms. McDonough’s treatment in Boston in order to comply with its legal responsibilities as a provider under New York’s Family Health Plus Insurance plan.

Students who worked on the case include, from left, Michael Frascarelli ’11, who worked on “peace of mind” issues around the client’s health care proxy, living will and power of attorney; Rita Romani ’11, who helped the client prepare for the hearing; and Alejandro Taylor ’09, the Barry A. Gold ’70 Health Law Clinic Fellow, who prepared the client’s last will.

New Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Joins Albany Law from Stanford

Susan Feathers joined Albany Law School as the new assistant dean for student affairs. Before joining the law school, Feathers was the executive director of the Levin Center for Public Service & Public Interest Law at Stanford University Law School.

In her new position, Feathers will provide oversight of student affairs activities, including student development and programming issues, student access and accommodations issues, and Student Bar Association and member organizations. She will also develop a more robust pro bono program and teach in the academic support program.

“Initiatives for the upcoming year include expanding our diversity programs to include service-learning components and developing more comprehensive wellness programming that will include stress management classes,” said Feathers.

Prior to her time at Stanford, she also served as assistant dean at the University of Pennsylvania Law School for nine years. While there, Feathers developed one of the country’s first mandatory pro bono programs, which subsequently won a pro bono award from the American Bar Association.

“The Office of Student Affairs is developing a more robust pro bono program through which students will have the opportunity to work on a host of new projects including a Foreclosure Prevention Project, a Medical–Legal Collaborative for veterans and seniors, a statewide rural legal service project, and a prisoners’ legal education program,” she said.

She has also been a public interest advisor at Yale Law School and held positions at Brooklyn Law School and Hofstra Law School. Feathers began her career as an associate appellate counsel with the Legal Aid Society’s Criminal Appeals Bureau in New York City. She earned her J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law in 1987, and her bachelor and master’s degrees in sociology from The University of Pennsylvania.