

Brown, Christie & Green Medical Malpractice Firm

Healthcare Scholarship Essay

The Proper Role of Government in Protecting Patients from Injury

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A government is only as strong and diverse as the population it fosters. People of all ages, ethnicities, social statuses, races, genders, and religions are embodied within our country; and though there are injustices, it is the responsibility of those who are in a position to effect positive change to do so. The proper role of government in protecting patients from injury is to enact and enforce legislation that will establish programs that protect the safety, well-being, and rights of the people under its care: especially those who are at risk and vulnerable.

The United States government has many agencies attached to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) which protect the well-being of all Americans. These agencies are responsible for developing legislation designed to promote the fair and equitable treatment of all American patients, and in doing so directly protects them from injury and abuse.

One of the HHS agencies which assists elderly is the Administration for Community Living (ACL). The ACL was created with the intent to promote elderly communal living, but also to allow the elderly to maintain their independence and be active members of society. The ACL also has many programs which promote the safety and security of its members, such as the Elder Justice Coordinating Council (Elder Justice Coordinating Council (EJCC), n.d.).

The Elder Justice Coordinating Council was established in 2010 with the passage of the Elder Justice Act in order to coordinate activities related to elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation across the federal government (Elder Justice Coordinating Council (EJCC), n.d.). The responsibility for implementing the EJCC rest with the Administration on Aging (AoA), which also resides within the ACL. The AoA promotes safety, justice, and independence for the elderly people it serves, and is a key program that the government has established to assist with abuse and injury prevention.

However, not all HHS agencies are directed solely toward protecting the elderly. In example, programs such as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) were established to improve the safety and quality of America's health care system as a whole. They are able to achieve this mission by focusing in on their three core competencies of health systems research, practice improvement, and data analytics (AHRQ's Core Competencies, n.d.).

By focusing on health systems research, the AHRQ is able to successfully make healthcare more affordable, accessible, and safer for American patients. Additionally, they also fund research that addresses Americas most pressing issues such as health insurance coverage, access, and affordability. Furthermore, in 1999 the Healthcare Research and Quality Act was passed which established an Office of Priority Populations within the AHQR (About Priority Populations, n.d.). This act supported research in healthcare delivery in inner cities and rural areas; and healthcare for priority populations which included, low-income populations, racial/ethnic minorities, women, children/adolescents, elderly, and individuals with special healthcare needs (About Priority Populations, n.d.). The AHQR also requires that the priority population be included in all supported research projects, which directly contributes to the safety and injury prevention of these minorities.

Another area of focus for the AHQR is practice improvement which helps physicians and clinicians progress in medicine that is safer and more effective for their patients. They do this by distributing tests, toolkits, and knowledge so that the information they gather is proven and grounded in solid evidence, so as to improve medical practice and the lives of the patients they serve. The AHQR also has a program known as the Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) Program which awards five-year contracts to select universities in the United States and Canada to act as EPCs. An EPC reviews all relevant scientific literature on a wide spectrum of topics to

produce evidence reports (Evidence-based Practice Centers (EPC) Program Overview, n.d.). These evidence reports are utilized to develop educational material, research agendas, and clinical guidelines that directly improve and protect the patients they affect.

The last area of focus for the AHQR is Data & Analytics, which primary function is to analyze information so that healthcare decision makers grasp how the system is working and where there is room for improvements. The data and trend analysis can be broken up by state so that elected officials may observe the certain strengths and weaknesses that exist in their state. It is an extremely valuable tool that can provide information such as the average cost of hospitalizations, number of opioid related deaths, and the most common reasons for hospitalizations. AHQR also provides a plethora of scholarly databases for research and reference. With all the information that the AHQR provides, elected officials can make informed decisions about government policy and legislation that can affect positive change for the American people.

Lastly, the HHS agency that is arguable most relevant and impactful right now due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC protects people from health threats both foreign and from the U.S. They detect and respond to new and emerging health threats by dissecting large amounts of data to find quick and effective solutions. In example, the CDC has been working with health departments and partners to develop vaccination programs to be able to successfully distribute the COVID-19 vaccine. The CDC is also conducting research to promote health equity in minorities and low-income communities. Historic housing patterns, employment circumstances, and other factors have placed members of certain racial and ethnic minority populations at higher risk for contracting COVID-19 (CDC COVID-19 Response Health Equity Strategy, n.d.). The CDC is focusing on

addressing inequities, injustices, and healthcare disparities in order to promote health equity and protect the underrepresented populations of this country.

The government protects its patients, both directly and indirectly, from injury and abuse by supporting the many agencies attached to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. We live in an imperfect country with many challenges and injustices, and the wellbeing of its community can get lost in politics at times. However, through trial and error our government has enacted legislation that places strategic programs and policies to promote safety and equality in its community. Our government's role is to provide programs to the community that enable them access to equitable healthcare, safety, and community resources.

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