

Celebrating Greater Hartford's Health Care Heroes

*John Lahtinen, Special Projects Editor
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As we prepare to close the books on 2011 and look ahead to 2012, it is a good time to reflect on the year and on a special group dedicated not only to caring for others, but to making lives better. Stem cell research, cardiovascular perfusion, traumatology, health care in schools, children's advocacy, communities of care... just a few of the dazzling array of specialties covered by the devoted group of health care professionals honored on Dec. 6 as 2011 Hartford Business Journal Health Care Heroes.

Our heroes were nominated by those who know their work the best — co-workers, clients, even parents — and selected by independent judges, based on an established criteria. They share a common passion for the services they provide and for the life-changing impacts they have on the lives of others. And they do all this with a genuine sense of humility.

We have a physician who was instrumental in establishing the state's only critical care helicopter service, a nurse turned CEO who spends her days working to provide access to adequate health care for area kids and their families, and a doctor researching and advancing our knowledge of a rare genetic disorder. We have an entire company dedicated to keeping heart patients out of the hospital, a nurse who is in essence a mother to struggling teen girls, and an executive devoted to helping patients navigate the complicated health care maze. There's an attorney committed to bringing legal services to low-income children and their families and one of just 3,500 cardiovascular perfusionists in the entire country who happens to work right in your backyard.

The Hartford Business Journal has reported on a number of trends in medicine this year — from electronic medical records to health care reform to continued hospital consolidation. Whatever 2012 has in store for health care, we can rest assured of the continued best efforts of our health care heroes — past, present and future. Congratulations, heroes and thank you.

Health Care Heroes 2011, Winner: Community Service Advocacy/Policy Jay Sicklick, Center for Children's Advocacy

Susan McDonald, Special to the Hartford Business Journal



For Connecticut's poorest children, medical needs and legal issues often go hand-in-hand. For more than a decade, Jay Sicklick, director of the Center for Children's Advocacy's Medical-Legal Partnership Project, has worked to bring legal services to low-income children and their families in an effort to improve their health outcomes.

"The root cause of a lot of health issues is poverty," Sicklick said. "It's just a fact that poor kids have poor health outcomes."

Each case is unique, but a typical scenario might involve a child whose medical condition is being caused or exacerbated by the family's living conditions. The child's primary care physician contacts the Medical-Legal Partnership Project and an attorney works with the family, health care provid-

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*Recognizing Outstanding Achievements
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ers, and others to secure Supplemental Security Income for the family and help the parents identify and access the federal and state assistance for which they qualify. “We’ve worked hard to get clinicians to think proactively about these issues,” Sicklick said. “We want to get people thinking of us as part of the health care system, and we want physicians to recognize that it’s part of their responsibility to address the social determinants that are affecting their patients.”

The center also advocates for children’s health on a systemic level. It has filed a complaint against the Hartford Public School System regarding educational opportunities for immigrant children, and Sicklick is promoting a new initiative for early identification of children with mental health issues.

When the Medical-Legal Partnership Project was launched in 2000, it was only the second of its kind. Now there are more than 150 scattered throughout the country, as well as a national center in Boston. In addition to Sicklick, the program employs one other full-time and one part-time attorney, and uses interns to help fill the gaps. Services have recently been scaled back because of funding issues, but Sicklick still hopes to expand outside the Hartford area and establish services in New Haven at some point.

In addition to directing the Medical-Legal Partnership Project, Sicklick is an adjunct professor of law at the University of Connecticut School of Law and an assistant clinical professor in pediatrics at the UConn School of Medicine.

His work is “fulfilling, but challenging. Sometimes when you get a good outcome, you see the parent’s years later and they tell you how well their kid is doing. It really makes you feel good.”