

Johns Hopkins, University of Baltimore form medical-law center

Center would be part academic, part think tank

By Meredith Cohn, The Baltimore Sun

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The [Johns Hopkins University](#) School of Medicine and the University of Baltimore School of Law said Tuesday that they would forge an unusual formal collaboration aimed at fostering a stronger relationship between doctors and lawyers so they may better understand the evolving health care landscape.

With a first-year budget of about \$1 million, the schools will open a center in July that will be part academic institution focused on educating practitioners and students of medicine and law, and part think tank aimed at influencing health care policy.

"The new center's goal will be to promote more understanding between the two professions," said Frederick Levy, a Hopkins emergency doctor who also holds a law degree and will co-direct the center. "In today's world, doctors and lawyers are used to facing each other in the courtroom. This center will be aimed at shifting some of the focus from the courtroom to the classroom."

The other co-director will be Gregory Dolin, who came from the George Washington School of Law, where he was a visiting associate professor. He also holds medical and law degrees.

The center, which will have a presence on both campuses, is expected to offer classroom instruction, a peer-reviewed journal, health law policy position papers and symposiums. Topics will include access to health care, patient safety, medical malpractice and tort reform, health insurance, bioethics and disaster medicine.

Directors, fellows, students and professors loaned from both schools will be involved with the center and will aim to tackle timely news and events. For example, if the center were open, it would likely have weighed in on the recent court rulings on the constitutionality of the national [health care reform](#) law's individual mandate to buy health insurance, said Phillip J. Closius, dean of the University of Baltimore School of Law.

He and others said the need for such a center grew out of discussions among lawyers and physicians about the need to better understand the court rulings and other legal and regulatory changes in the health care arena.

There are many schools that have medical-legal programs aiming to educate future lawyers on health care issues, including the Law & Health Care Program at the University of Maryland School of Law. Other schools offer joint medical-law degrees, such as the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine.

Most of these programs are housed in one school or the other for the benefit of those students, said Marshall Kapp, director of the [Florida State University](#) Center for Innovative Collaboration in Medicine & Law, which was created last year and appears to have a similar form and mission to the planned Hopkins-Baltimore center.

Kapp also pointed to the many medical-legal partnerships formed at universities, hospitals or community centers that typically aim to help low-income client-patients gain access to health care and legal services. But they don't serve the same educational role as his center.

The true collaborations are long overdue, he said. There have long been misunderstanding and some distrust between doctors and lawyers, and these centers may help not only current students but professionals through continuing education.

And as the health care debate continues and other medical-legal policy questions arise, they can also serve as information clearinghouses for state and national policymakers, who are often overwhelmed by special interests, Kapp said.

"We want our center to be seen as an honest broker, with no ideological axe to grind," he said. "Policymakers get information all the time provided by individuals that may be well meaning but have particular ideological or economic axes to grind. I hope that we can establish credibility because of our ivory tower location that will allow them to depend on the input we can provide."

"Our institutions believe that health care issues can best be resolved through cooperative effort by the medical and legal professions," Closius said. "I'm confident that the center will become a significant national voice in the health care law discussions that are certain to come."

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