

Episode: *Author Interview: “How Should MLP Clinicians and Attorneys Help Veterans Secure Disability Benefits When Health Records Documentation Is Insufficient?”*

Guest: Cynthia Geppert, MD, PhD, DPS, MA, MPH, MSB, MSJ, HEC-C

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Cynthia Geppert, a senior ethicist at the VA’s National Center for Ethics in Health Care, consultation-liaison psychiatrist at the New Mexico Veterans Affairs Health Care System, professor of psychiatry and internal medicine at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, and adjunct professor of bioethics at the Alden March Bioethics Center, Albany Medical College. She’s here to discuss her article, [“How Should MLP Clinicians and Attorneys Help Veterans Secure Disability Benefits When Health Records Documentation Is Insufficient?”](#), in the August 2024 issue of the Journal, [Standards in Medical-Legal Partnerships](#). Dr Geppert, thank you so much for being back on the podcast.

DR CYNTHIA GEPPERT: Thanks, Tim. It’s so good to be back and have an article again in the *AMA Journal of Ethics*. [music fades]

[00:01:06] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point of this article?

GEPPERT: So, the main point of my article, it’s in an issue—the August issue is about medical-legal partnerships—and my article is looking at medical-legal partnerships in the VA, which you can tell from my biography where I’ve spent my career. And it talks about how medical-legal partnerships are very important for veterans, that there are unique aspects of VA health care where medical-legal partnerships can be incredibly beneficial, and some aspects of the VA as a system that facilitate medical-legal partnerships, and a few challenges, which the article discusses how to, strategies to overcome those.

[00:01:50] HOFF: And so, what do you think is the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take from your article?

GEPPERT: So, when I was in training and when I teach trainees, I think we all have a sort of inherent fear of lawyers because we have a legitimate, understandable worry about malpractice and other sanctions. And so, unless we have things like the medical-legal partnership, we tend to not really understand each other and to think that we have very different ethos. So, medical-legal partnerships and other forms of collaboration between the legal and medical profession can help us get to know each other and

realize that in a very, if you look really, zoom out, we do have very, a lot of overlapping values and common commitments and that we can join together and work not as adversaries, but as allies for the good of patients and of society.

[00:02:47] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or space for, what would that be?

GEPPERT: So I try to make it, in the article, but I would have given more attention to just that legal health—if I can use that phrase—is so key to medical health, not just for veterans, but for all patients because there are so many issues that challenge veterans and other patients and other health care systems that really can't be addressed by us as health care professionals. We can help. We have the expertise. But getting people social services, disability benefits when those are indicated and appropriate can really change people's lives and enable them to exercise their own self-determination and realize their potential and take care of their health in a way that especially those who are, who have been struggling with inequities of our health care system and our society, they really can't overcome those without a collaboration between their doctors and other health care practitioners and lawyers. We both have real expertise, and we need each other. [theme music returns] And we need to work together for the benefits of the patients and veterans who need us.

[00:04:14] HOFF: Dr Geppert, thank you so much for being back on the podcast and for your continued contributions to the Journal.

GEPPERT: Thanks so much, Tim. Good to be here and good to talk to you again.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.