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Legal nurse consultants: A membership opportunity worth considering

The most important concern facing voluntary bars is membership--recruiting and retaining members. Incorporating this challenge with a focus of the West Virginia Bar Association to foster opportunities for engagement within the entire legal community, the WVBA has gone beyond the traditional boundaries of membership--i.e., judges and attorneys--and included associate membership opportunities for legal assistants and, the bar's latest addition, legal nurse consultants.

In June of 2002, the WVBA invited LNCs to join the organization as associate members, and became the first statewide bar association to create a legal nurse consultant section. This benefited the association by infusing it with new vitality and enhancing collegiality among all members. This group differs from paralegals by virtue of their specialized health care training and clinical experience. As licensed registered nurses, LNCs are uniquely qualified to recognize, interpret, and analyze medically related information, making them valuable members of the litigation team. By creating a special membership category for legal nurse consultants, the WVBA sparked the interest of LNCs around the country, many of whom are interested in creating a similar affiliation with bar associations in their region. Other bar associations looking for ways to increase membership should consider the following benefits of inviting legal nurse consultants to join their organization.

Benefits to the bar association:

- 1) Opportunities to increase membership and revenue.
- 2) More volunteers for bar association projects.
- 3) Networking with additional members of the legal team.
- 4) Assistance with seminar planning and speaker recruiting.
- 5) LNC authors for medical-legal articles in bar publications.

Benefits to LNC members:

- 1) Recognition and validation of LNC practice within the legal community through membership in a professional legal organization.
- 2) Networking opportunities with attorneys, judges, and other LNCs.
- 3) Professional development through educational programs.
- 4) Publishing opportunities in bar association journals/newsletters.
- 5) Social/professional events throughout the year sponsored by the bar association.

Inviting LNCs to join

To begin the process of recruiting members, the bar's executive director contacted the local chapter of the American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants. The invitation to join the WVBA was received with great enthusiasm. By partnering with

an established organization, the recruitment process was enhanced, with leaders from the initial group available to handle many organizational aspects.

Interest in the organization grew within the legal nurse consulting community, and LNCs from out of state expressed an interest in joining, too. Currently there are members from Delaware, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas, with the majority from West Virginia and Virginia.

Drafting bylaws and electing a board

As membership grew, the need for further organization of the group became clear. A panel of volunteer LNC leaders drafted bylaws and submitted them to the LNC Section members for approval. The bylaws were then ready for review and final approval by the executive director and executive council.

The first LNC Section Board of Directors was elected in July 2003. A special founding meeting was held. This generated a great deal of excitement among members, and paved the way for the group to continue to grow. Board meetings were held to organize the group's activities and begin the strategic planning process. Key committees were established, and additional volunteers were recruited to work on LNC Section projects.

Managing the LNC Section

Membership in the LNC Section of the WVBA is open to licensed RNs currently working in the legal arena. LNCs from any state may join as long as they meet the eligibility criteria. Membership in the American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants is also required at the national level. The AALNC is dedicated to the advancement of the profession, and has produced many important publications related to the practice of legal nurse consulting, including a scope of practice, code of ethics, and core curriculum. For more information, visit www.aalnc.org.

The LNC Section Board of Directors and committee chairpersons, under the direction of the LNC Section president, manage group projects. The WVBA staff generally handles the collection of dues and financial matters related to events, along with other administrative tasks, just as they do for any other division or section.

The LNC Section president coordinates the activities of the section, provides periodic updates to the executive director, and presents a report to the bar leadership at Executive Council (board of directors) meetings. The executive director functions mainly in an advisory capacity. The LNC Section president is the group's spokesperson and the initial point of contact for members.

Currently the LNC Section has four major committees: the Education Committee, Membership Committee, Marketing Committee, and Web Site Committee. The Membership Committee helps the staff process new member applications. Volunteers

from this committee ensure that LNC applicants meet the published criteria, including membership in AALNC.

One of the primary benefits of the LNC Section, in addition to its membership and dues revenue additions, is its members' enthusiastic participation in planning quality educational programs. The Education Committee typically recruits several interesting speakers for the bar's annual meeting and the section's annual conference, which draws a good mix of LNCs and attorneys concerned with medical-legal issues. These medical-legal lectures are approved for CLE credit, as well as continuing education credit for nurses.

Start your own section

The inclusion of legal assistants and legal nurse consultants has benefited the WVBA in a number of ways and embraces the entire legal profession. The bar is especially proud to recognize and include legal nurse consultants, as this dynamic group has brought extraordinary vitality and excitement to the WVBA, far exceeding the expectations of the Executive Council.

For a positive impact on membership and overall success, other bar associations should consider including membership of this specialized group. For more information, visit the Web site for the WVBA LNC Section at www.wvbarassociation.org/lncsection or contact Pryce Haynes, WVBA executive director, at director@wvbarassociation.org.

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