The lawyers are in

W&M Elder Law Clinic helps seniors plan for the future

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The Elder Law Clinic at the College of William and Mary has been helping area seniors for about a year.

Second and third year law students and staff have assisted approximately 50 area seniors better prepare for the future.

They help the elderly manage legal issues including drawing up a will, preparing for long term care needs and establishing power of attorney.

The clinic assists with living wills, probate administration, guardianship and conservatorship actions, competency determinations, nursing home concerns, elder abuse, Social Security, veterans benefits and Medicare and Medicaid.

Helena Mock is the managing attorney at the Elder Law Clinic.

Third year law student Vanessa Steltenpohl has been taking part since the clinic’s beginning and has enjoyed her participation.

“I am very interested in writing wills and estate planning,” she said recently. “So this is a good fit for me.”

She has already seen its positive impact in the lives of the clients seeking help.

“It is amazing the need for these services in the community,” she said. “It is great as a law student to be able to help people.”

In class, law students often study hypothetical scenarios. But the clinic allows students to meet actual clients and work through specific problems.

“A client has such unique needs and there are many emotional factors,” she explained. “You can’t prepare for that unless you have real experience in a clinic atmosphere.”

Additionally, students in the Elder Law Clinic often make presentations to educate seniors, their families and caregivers.

Next week an Elder Law presentation is scheduled at 1 p.m., Friday March 22 at Chambrel. The presentation will cover basic estate planning necessities including necessary documents, power of attorney, living wills, trusts, joint accounts and beneficiaries.

Steltenpohl said interest in the clinic took off soon after it was advertised locally. One small newspaper advertisement immediately brought about a dozen clients. One topic they have been called on to assist with is maneuvering through Medicare and Medicaid systems.

“Medicare can be very confusing,” Steltenpohl said. “It is great that we can help people understand this very complex system.”

Steltenpohl said she will continue working at the clinic during summer. “It is important to have people year-round to help clients,” she said.

The Elder Clinic program is free, but donations are accepted.

Steltenpohl said the goal of the clinic is to help as many seniors as possible. “The more the merrier,” she said.

More—For more information e-mail elderlaw@wm.edu or call 221-3780.