



## Teacher and advocate Meg Gaines earns Health Law Attorney of the Year Award

*UW Law Professor Meg Gaines, a cancer survivor, draws from personal experience while directing the Center for Patient Partnerships, a patient advocacy center designed to help others facing serious illness.*

April 21, 2010 – The ever-changing tide of health care and the sometimes incomprehensible “medical jargon” can make the routine doctor visit overwhelming. Now imagine the difficult course one takes when faced with a life-threatening illness such as cancer. Attorney and University of Wisconsin Law School Professor Meg Gaines helps patients navigate their way through a complex system, and teaches others to help them do it.

For her efforts, the State Bar’s Health Law Section has chosen Gaines to receive the first inaugural Health Law Lawyer of the Year award, to be presented May 6 at the State Bar’s [Annual Convention](#).

Gaines, a 1983 U.W. Law School graduate, is a clinical professor and director of U.W.’s [Center for Patient Partnerships](#). The Center trains UW students from the schools of Medicine, Law, Nursing, Pharmacy and Social Work to advocate on behalf of patients faced with serious illnesses. The center, which is 80 percent funded by donations and does not accept donations from organizations that profit from health care, serves approximately 500 patients a year. Gaines says patient advocacy allows patients to become “captain of the ship” when it comes to their own care.

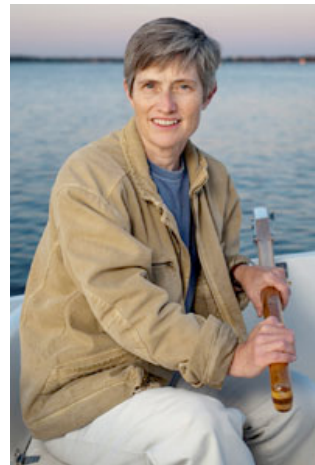


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“Patient advocacy covers three major areas,” Gaines said. “First, we help [patients] make their own decisions when it comes to treatment and develop a team of support. Second, we help them access insurance and navigate the barriers associated with it. Third, we help them strategize to keep employment. Since the majority of Americans obtain health care through employers, often a serious illness leads to the risk of losing employment and the employer-based insurance coverage. We help them deal with those issues.”

Gaines understands first-hand the difficulties that patients face in dealing with life-threatening illness. In 1994, with two young children, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and fought to obtain the treatment and care that saved her life. The experience instilled the inspiration for a new path to patient advocacy and, ultimately, the opening of the center in 2000. A recent [On Wisconsin](#) article details Gaines’ struggle and the importance of the center to other patients.

“I got tuned into this issue when it struck my own life,” Gaines said. “I came to understand what people face under these circumstances. As a teacher, it was natural for me to expand this understanding with the goal of helping patients navigate through difficult times. I think that’s the most rewarding aspect – the sort of alchemistic effect that comes from taking a difficult experience and turning into a better one.”

Gaines teaches a course in patient advocacy, which gives students the tools they need to help patients understand their diagnosis, make treatment decisions, and navigate the health insurance landscape to ensure they get the treatment they need. The center is striving to become a national model of excellence.

The Health Law Section recognized Gaines as a person who has made a significant contribution to the preservation and enhancement of the health and life of the people in Wisconsin. Chairperson Barbara J. Zabawa noted that “[Meg] is passionate about advancing the interests of patients and inspires others to advocate for persons who feel lost in the complexities of health care.”

Gaines will be honored May 6 at the Annual Convention’s Volunteer Recognition and Member Networking Celebration starting at 6:15 p.m. at the Monona Terrace Convention Center, Madison.

Visit [wisbar.org](http://wisbar.org) for a complete list of this year’s [award recipients](#).