

Hospitals call malpractice costs 'crippling'

Hospital medical malpractice coverage accounted for more than 70 percent of the increase in hospital costs over the last year, according to a state-wide survey conducted by the Michigan Hospital Association (MHA).

Malpractice costs are crippling hospitals' ability to provide quality health care," said Spencer Johnson, MHA president.

"There is something drastically wrong with a system where more money is poured into the medical liability system than can be allocated for critical health-care concerns such as care of the poor or addressing our state's high infant-mortality rate.

"No one's needs are being adequately met under the present system. The MHA remains strong in its conviction that overhauling the malpractice tort system is the best action that can be taken. We remain optimistic that the Legislature will enact such a measure."

THE AGGREGATE cost of malpractice coverage for Michigan hospitals in 1985 totals nearly \$200 million, an average of \$1 million per hospital, MHA said.

Every hospital admission cost \$164

for medical liability coverage in 1985.

"At a time when hospitals are trying to find means to control health-care costs while maintaining the level of quality, malpractice remains an enormous issue for us," Johnson said.

"We're talking about \$200 million of hospital revenue going toward malpractice coverage. As a basis for comparison, the entire 1985 Medicaid budget for hospitals was \$635 million," Johnson added.

THE STUDY also showed that hospitals' malpractice costs had increased 88 percent from 1984 to 1985.

It indicated that hospitals are bearing two-thirds of the total bill for medical malpractice coverage in Michigan. Insurance Bureau reports indicate that Michigan physicians are paying \$85 million annually.

Service cutbacks due to the malpractice crisis, as well as difficulties in physician recruiting, were the most frequently reported results of this growing malpractice crisis.

While large and mid-sized hospitals reported the greatest difficulty in attracting obstetricians, small and rural hospitals reported a marked difficulty in recruiting all specialties.

Johnson said malpractice claims have more than quadrupled, to 23 for every 100 physicians, over the last 10 years. Nationally, the average settlement has grown from \$28,000 to \$330,000 over the same period, he said.

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