

# Health Alert

## Protecting Your Access To Emergency Medical Care

(NAPSA)—Experts say this country's emergency rooms are in need of intensive care. Across the country, physicians and concerned citizens—as part of a grassroots coalition—want to work to ensure that emergency medical care will be available when you need it.

Emergency rooms have been forced to close down or turn away critically injured patients, and increasing numbers of doctors are having to cut back on “high-risk” lifesaving treatments because of the escalating number and cost of medical liability lawsuits, according to medical groups who track the issue.

Doctors for Medical Liability Reform, a coalition of medical specialists, identifies 42 states as being “in crisis” or “experiencing serious problems” in patient access to quality care because the explosion of lawsuits is driving medical liability insurance beyond the reach of many doctors.

As a result, many doctors are relocating out of crisis states, cutting back on services or abandoning the practice of medicine altogether.

“In some parts of the country it has become almost impossible to find an obstetrician to deliver a baby, or a neurologist to treat serious head or spine injuries,” says Stuart L. Weinstein, M.D., Chairman of Doctors for Medical Liability Reform. “The question more and more people are asking is, will I be able to find the doctor I need when I need him most.”

Weinstein and others point to the rapid escalation in both the



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number and cost of suits, with the average award rising from about \$350,000 in 1997 to more than \$600,000 in 2004.

Doctors who win their cases still spend nearly \$100,000 in defense costs, and even doctors who have never been sued can find their premiums becoming unaffordable.

The general taxpayer is hit hard, too.

The U.S. government estimates that the direct cost of medical liability coverage increases federal health programs by as much as \$56 billion a year.

Protect Patients Now, a grassroots coalition, is pressing for national reform of the nation's medical liability system.

To find out more about the medical liability crisis and what you can do to protect your access to quality medical care, visit [www.ProtectPatientsNow.org](http://www.ProtectPatientsNow.org).