



ACADEMIC MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS
INSURANCE EXCHANGE RISK RETENTION GROUP
1250 Broadway, Suite 3401
New York, NY 10001

www.academicins.com

AHPIA Solutions, Inc.
Attorney-in-Fact

Tel: 646 808 0600
Fax: 646 808 0601

Malpractice Awards in 2010 Lowest on Record

Delicia Honen Yard | August 23, 2011

Malpractice awards may be at an all time low in the United States, according to the consumer watchdog group, Public Citizen. The group released its 2010 report, which was based on data obtained from the National Practitioner Data Bank (NPDB). The NPDB began tracking medical malpractice payments in 1990. Results of this year's analysis showed that the number of malpractice payments made on behalf of doctors in 2010 was the lowest on record. The total number of payments made on behalf of physicians dropped to 10,195 in 2010, down from a high of 16,566 in 2001. The majority of the payments were for injuries resulting in death or permanent injury.

Despite this decline, the costs of health care continue to rise. Public Citizen claims that according to the data, medical malpractice payments only amounted to 0.13% of overall health care costs, sparking the group to question why health care costs are rising while malpractice payments are diminishing. According to the report, total health care costs rose 90% between 2000 and 2010, while medical malpractice payment dropped 11.9%.

The drop in malpractice payments has not been due to a decrease in medical errors, according to Public Citizen, which cited three major studies published in 2010 and 2011. The first study, from the Inspector General of the Department of Health & Human Services, concluded that one of seven Medicare patients in hospitals experienced a serious adverse event, that these adverse events contributed to the deaths of 1.5% of Medicare patients and that 44% of the adverse events were preventable. The second study, which looked at patients in North Carolina hospitals, found that 18% suffered adverse events and 63% of these were preventable. The third study, published this last April 2011, revealed that adverse events or errors occur in almost one in three hospital admissions.

The authors of the Public Citizen report conclude that this contrast between the drop in malpractice payments and the continued problem of medical errors suggest that the real medical malpractice crisis is over “the epidemic of medical errors, not over the relatively rare compensatory payments.”