

Oklahoma Alliance of Physicians for Tort Reform

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Oklahoma Physicians' Survey Shows Serious Concern about Lawsuits

A recent survey of Oklahoma physicians shows that **more than half** of them are considering early retirement due to the cost or threat of lawsuits and **more than half** have or would discourage new physicians from practicing medicine in Oklahoma due to the current lawsuit climate. Preliminary results from the survey, conducted by the Oklahoma Alliance of Physicians for Tort Reform (OAPTR), a bi-partisan physician organization, point to significant concern among physicians about the current lawsuit climate in the state. Contrary to a recent survey conducted by Oklahoma Senators Charles Laster and Mike Morgan among Oklahoma judges, purportedly showing that there is little concern by the legal profession about a liability crisis in the state, this study shows that Oklahoma physicians have changed their practices significantly in order to reduce the exposure to medical lawsuits.

Eight-eight percent of the physicians surveyed practice “defensive medicine”, increasing the number of tests, referrals, or patient visits in order to avoid being sued. **Sixty percent** of the physicians have stopped performing some medical procedures. **Two-thirds** of the physicians surveyed had at least one malpractice lawsuit filed against them. “Defensive medicine has been a major factor in the increase in medical costs, which eventually is passed on to patients and reduces the ability to afford health care”, said Dr. Eli Reshef, of OAPTR. “Anyone who claims that **64%** of Oklahoma physicians deserve to be sued, or that there is no concern in our state about access to care, is blatantly ignoring a major legal and healthcare crisis that is brewing here”, he added. **Eighty-eight percent** of physicians surveyed consider the lawsuit climate in Oklahoma a major concern. “One of the most troubling findings is that **51%** of physicians surveyed consider early retirement. These are the most experienced physicians in our state”, said Dr. Don Murray of OAPTR. “It is equally troubling that **19%** consider actually leaving the state”, he added.

“How can we provide quality care to Oklahomans if new physicians are discouraged from establishing practice here and experienced physicians in their prime consider early retirement?”, asks Dr. Norman Imes of OAPTR. Even though the survey has been sent to physicians only a week ago, more than one-fifth of Oklahoma Obstetrician/Gynecologists, one of the specialties most vulnerable to lawsuits, have already responded. Approximately **15%** of them have retired early, left the state, or stopped delivering babies in the past several years. The OAPTR has provided significant input into **House Bill 3120**, a comprehensive lawsuit reform bill that has passed the Oklahoma House and is currently being considered in the Senate. “If the Senate leadership tables HB 3120 and refuses to allow it to be heard in a democratic process, it ignores a fundamental need for quality healthcare in our state and indirectly penalizes its own constituency”, said Reshef.

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