

June 20, 2008

It's the fourth quarter for state Budget negotiations. The Governor and legislative leaders are narrowing their priorities for the coming fiscal year.

Healthcare is an issue which impacts every household and business in Pennsylvania. While our elected leaders in Harrisburg may have postponed an agreement on how to make quality health insurance more affordable for small businesses, families and working adults, there is one thing they all agree on now: doctors need Mcare Abatement to continue providing medical care in Pennsylvania.

The Mcare Abatement Program has protected our healthcare system from the devastating effects of the medical liability crisis. Enacted in 2003, the program has helped thousands of doctors to continue practicing in Pennsylvania and it has also helped to recruit young doctors to our state.

Unfortunately, Mcare abatement was not renewed in January. As a result, high-risk specialty surgeons such as Ob-gyns, neurosurgeons, general surgeons, and orthopaedic surgeons were forced to pay tens of thousands of dollars in unanticipated liability costs in March.

Worse yet, under current law, all physicians will be forced to shoulder two 25% increases in their medical liability insurance premium costs over the next four years, plus ruinous additional, annual surcharges to retire over \$1.8 billion of unfunded liability of the state-mandated, state-run Mcare Fund. These cost increases scheduled for January 1, 2010 will force many specialty surgeons out of business or out of Pennsylvania and may cause critical shortages for life-saving medical treatment.

In return for the state's assistance with medical liability costs, doctors agree to continue practicing for one additional year in Pennsylvania. Without Mcare Abatement doctors may consider leaving the Commonwealth to go to states with lower overhead costs and higher reimbursement.

Just as our healthcare system has begun to show some recovery with increasing orthopaedic procedures – knee and hip replacements, treatment for hip and other fractures – our aging population needs a guarantee that specialty surgeons will be available when they are needed most.

Let's not let the clock run out on critical medical care for Pennsylvanians. It's time to re-enact Mcare Abatement now and to continue work toward increased patient access to care.

Charles D. "Chip" Hummer, III, M.D.

Immediate Past-President
Pennsylvania Orthopaedic Society