

Docs angry about med-mal hike

New York's physicians are unhappy with the new crop of medical malpractice insurance rates, which rose an average of 14%. The increase is the highest since 1993, when rates were also raised by that amount.

"This will fuel a crisis we've been warning about," says Dr. Robert Goldberg, president of the Medical Society of the State of New York.

The double-digit rate hike was necessary to make up for years of "artificially low rates," says Insurance Superintendent Eric Dinallo. He blames his predecessors for allowing rates to increase an average of 6.3% over the past five years. The increase in 2006 was 9%.

The Medical Liability Mutual Insurance Co., the state's largest med-mal carrier, sought hikes of 8% to 30% during that time. The hikes will mean, for instance, that a Long Island neurosurgeon's insurance will now cost more than \$309,000 a year.

That could drive doctors out of the state. "We will see a worsening of access to health care not just upstate but in Brooklyn and Queens. The impact on the Bronx could be catastrophic," says Dr. Goldberg.

The state branch of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says its members are shocked by the increase, calling it "unsustainable." An OB-GYN in the Bronx will now pay \$180,490, and an OB-GYN in Suffolk County will pay \$196,642.

"The crisis is real, the crisis is now," says Dr. Richard Waldman, chair of ACOG's New York organization.