

Norman Shriver
1011 Edann Road
Oreland, PA 19075
215 886-1139
e.shriver@prodigy.net

My access to medical care has been affected several times during this last year due to the rising cost of malpractice insurance. I first came to recognize how rising malpractice rates affected my care when I tried to find a neurosurgeon this spring to perform a surgery on my spine, which had disconnected due to a spinal neuropathic injury. The surgeon I had previously used had moved to Chicago a couple of years ago, and had recommended another surgeon to take over my care. I tried to call the second surgeon only to find that he had moved to North Carolina due to rising malpractice rates. I couldn't find a qualified surgeon in my area to perform the surgery so I drove to Chicago to have the surgery.

Following a successful surgery in Chicago, I returned to my home near Philadelphia. A couple of days later, it was apparent that I had developed an infection at the surgery site. I went to the local hospital for treatment. The doctors diagnosed a MRSA infection, and treated me with antibiotics. However, the surgeons at the local hospital refused to perform a surgery to clean out the infection, because they had not performed the first surgery, and did not want to be held liable if something were to go wrong. Four days later, I was transferred to a large teaching hospital in Philadelphia, and the surgeons there performed the surgery.

This December I developed a wound that needed surgery. I went to the local hospital for surgery, and I developed an enterococcus infection. The only drugs that could treat the infection were vancomycin and ampicillin. Since I had shown allergic

reactions to both medications in the past, the doctor decided to have me tested for ampicillan allergies. Before testing me for allergies, the allergist called my wife to discuss the risks. He stated that the other team of allergists at the hospital would not touch this procedure for fear of liabilities. My wife reassured the doctor that she would not sue him, and he performed the allergy test.

I was released from the hospital only to return with another MRSA infection. This time the surgeon who had performed the flap surgery for my wound was unable to do the surgery to clean out the infection because he was temporarily without malpractice insurance. He recommended me to another doctor who performed the surgery. The second doctor is handling my follow up care.

Fortunately, I have been able to get through all of these incidents without loss of life. However, I am very distressed that good doctors have left the area because of rising medical malpractice rates, and the ones that remain need to consider the risks of liability before the risk to my health. I would like to get back to a system where doctors can put their patients' needs first, without fear of reprisal.

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