

Flood of physicians into Texas is 'like Interstate 35 at 5 p.m.'



By DAVID HENDRICKS

Physicians are flocking to Texas, thanks to limits on malpractice lawsuit awards.

In fact, so many doctors are applying for Texas licenses that a logjam has formed, and hospitals and clinics are worried that some applicants will go to other states rather than wait three to six months for a Texas license.

Statewide approval of Proposition 12 in 2003 triggered the rush for applications. Before Proposition 12, the state did not impose a cap on the amount of noneconomic damages in a malpractice lawsuit against doctors. Proposition 12 established a cap of \$250,000.

The result of the legal protection is a landslide of doctors wanting to move to Texas.

In 2001, the Texas Medical Board processed 2,446 licenses for doctors

including those who had just received Texas medical school degrees. In fiscal 2005, the number rose to 2,992. But in fiscal 2006, ended Aug. 31, the number jumped to 4,026.

"Poof. It exploded," board spokeswoman Jill Wiggins said.

Halfway through fiscal 2007, or through the end of February, the number of pending licenses stood at 2,063, which puts the board on track for 4,100 for the fiscal year.

But instead of 8,000 new doctors opening practices in Texas in a two-year period. Dr. Donald Patrick, Texas Medical Board executive director, fears that only 6,000 to 7,000 will end up in Texas because of the backlog.

Before the crush, the board could license a clean application from a doctor just out of medical school

in 18 days. But the wait has grown to 84 days for easy applications — those from doctors right out of medical school — but more than six months for physicians with work histories, he said.

"It's like Interstate 35 at 5 p.m., It isn't moving. There's too many cars," Patrick said. Because applications are delayed, doctors call the office to inquire, causing further delay.

Coming to Texas

As of the end of January, the Texas Medical Board had the most pending applications for licenses from doctors in these states:



Texas	475	Pennsylvania	63
New York	145	Massachusetts	60
California	118	Michigan	57
Florida	100	New Jersey	52
Louisiana	94	Oklahoma	52
Illinois	71		

Source: Texas Alliance for Patient Access

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