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**Health care and business communities unite to form CARE Coalition**

**CHARLESTON, W.Va.**— West Virginia’s doctors, hospitals, health care providers and businesses gathered on Monday, October 21, 2002, at the State Capitol to call attention to the need for medical liability reform to ensure patient access to health care.

The day marked the kick-off of the **CARE Coalition**. The coalition is a statewide campaign bringing a diverse group of health care and business organizations together to encourage the state’s policymakers, health care stakeholders and citizens to support medical liability reform.

“This is an incredible demonstration of support for the **CARE Coalition** and the point of uniting is to emphasize that patient access to health care is the number one priority in our effort,” said Steven J. Summer, president of the West Virginia Hospital Association. “Members of the CARE Coalition are committed to maintaining the availability of health care services and ensuring that all West Virginians have access to physician services when and where they need it.”

Michael Hicks Vice President of the West Virginia Health Care Association, which is a member of the **CARE Coalition**, said that over the last year, medical liability has become both unavailable and unaffordable to health care providers including doctors, hospitals and even long term care facilities like nursing homes.

“The unavailability of insurance is resulting in doctors leaving the state,” said Hicks. “Older, experienced doctors are retiring sooner and younger recruits including residents and interns no longer consider West Virginia a satisfactory place to practice. This trend, which appears to be accelerating, is affecting the most important aspect of the health care delivery system in West Virginia – patient care.”

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Speaking on behalf of another **CARE Coalition** member, Dr. Ron Stollings, president-elect of the West Virginia State Medical Association, said that it's becoming increasingly clear that "health care access is becoming a casualty of the state's medical liability crisis."

Stollings said, "this crisis is a domino effect of causes: insurance companies fail or leave the market, premiums skyrocket, hospitals and health care providers struggle to meet increased costs, and physicians, facing loss of coverage or exorbitant prices hikes, exit the health care system. In the end, the patients are left vulnerable as the ultimate victims, unable to get the care they need, when they need it."

Stollings noted that in some parts of the state, doctors have stopped offering "high risk" services in order to lower their liability insurance costs. He said that doctors have elected to scale back the scope of their practice in order to limit their liability risk. Most significantly affected are patients with such conditions as head trauma, broken bones, pregnancy and emergency situations.

Tom Corder, president and chief executive officer of Camden Clark Memorial Hospital in Parkersburg said that in order for West Virginia to keep doctors, to recruit new ones and to ensure access to health care for all West Virginia, a number of medical liability reforms should be enacted.

Corder said, "West Virginia must join other states in enacting the types of reforms that will provide protection and compensation for injured patients while not unfairly punishing health care providers in medical liability cases."

The **CARE Coalition** supports a number of reforms including:

1. Enhancing requirements for experts. Doctors who testify in medical liability cases should be experts in the area in which they are testifying and should be engaged in active clinical practice. For example – a specialist in foot care would not be able to testify about the standard of care in cases involving head trauma;
2. Limiting the settlement an attorney can receive so that more of the award goes to the patient rather than to the attorney;
3. Placing lower monetary limits on non-economic damages for pain and suffering;
4. Holding health care providers responsible in medical liability cases only for the amount of damages for which they are at fault. This change would prevent those who are not at fault from paying for injuries for which they are not responsible; and

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5. Disclosing to the court when other insurers have already paid for a plaintiff's injuries so that people who sue do not get paid more than once for the same damages.

“These and other reforms will help bring balance, stability and fairness to our medical liability system in West Virginia,” said Corder. “More importantly, the CARE Coalition believes these types of reforms will put patients first by ensuring access to health care.”

Along with the West Virginia Hospital Association, the West Virginia State Medical Association and the West Virginia Health Care Association, the **CARE Coalition** thus far, is comprised of the following organizations:

West Virginia Orthopedic Society,  
West Virginia Association of Physician Assistants  
West Virginia Academy of Family Physicians  
West Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Anesthesiologists  
West Virginia Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians,  
West Virginia Roundtable  
West Virginia State Chamber of Commerce

In addition to the distribution of materials, the **CARE Coalition** will be conducting meetings throughout state to inform the public about the need for medical liability reform.

For more information, visit [www.carecoalition.org](http://www.carecoalition.org)

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