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Governor: Medical malpractice payouts dropping

October 6, 2010 - By MIKE REUTHER mreuther@sungazette.com

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Gov. Ed Rendell announced Tuesday that medical malpractice fund payouts statewide have decreased by 61 percent since 2003, and that's good news for doctors who pay increasingly less for medical malpractice insurance.

"This is a real success story in Pennsylvania," he said during a teleconference call with newspaper reporters. "It shows what happens when everyone works together."

Since 2002, the Rendell administration has worked with the state Legislature for reforms, including creating a Patient Safety Authority to instruct patients and consumers on medical error prevention and to ensure malpractice actions only be brought in the county where they took place to avoid venue shopping.

According to figures released by the governor's office, total Mcare payouts dropped from more than \$341 million in 2000 to about \$178 million last year.

Number of claims fell in those years from 699 to 396.

Rendell said the statistics refute claims that doctors are leaving the state to avoid skyrocketing malpractice costs.

Physicians overall now pay 64 percent less on average for Mcare than they did in 2002.

Mcare, or Medical Care Availability and Reduction Error Fund is the physician-supported pool used to pay a portion of their malpractice costs.

But as further evidence that the state's "malpractice crisis" has abated, the governor noted that drops in the primary level of coverage for doctors in the private market fell 20 percent since 2003.

Twenty-one more insurance carriers are in the market today than eight years ago, he noted.

Rendell said it will be up to the state insurance commissioner to ever decide phasing out Mcare.

"I think we should keep it a little longer," he said.

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