

# Malpractice caps lure docs to Texas

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Medical malpractice award caps in Texas have swollen the ranks of medical specialists and license applications at the state medical board, official said.

Texas voters approved a constitutional amendment capping medical malpractice lawsuit awards four years ago. That has led to doctors from across the country to head to the Lone Star State to set up practice, and taking healthcare to some historically underserved rural areas, The New York Times reported.

The physicians' arrival flooded the medical board's offices in Austin with applications for licenses to practice, nearing 2,500 at last count. Average wait time for a license: about six months.

"It was hard to believe at first; we thought it was a spike," Dr. Donald W. Patrick, executive director of the medical board and a neurosurgeon and lawyer, told the Times of the license application increase. But the trend held.

"Doctors are coming to Texas because they sense a friendlier malpractice climate," he said.

Critics, however, question whether patients are more vulnerable since the cap, the Times said. With reduced malpractice exposure, critics said, many doctors cut back on their insurance coverage, making it more difficult for plaintiffs to collect damages.

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