

Fewer malpractice claims paid in the US

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(HealthDay)—The number of medical malpractice payments in the United States has dropped sharply since 2002, according to a new study. And compensation payment amounts and liability insurance costs for many doctors declined in recent years. These findings were published online Oct. 30 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Researchers analyzed 2002 to 2013 data from California, Colorado, Illinois, New York, and Tennessee. Overall, the rate of paid malpractice claims decreased from 18.6 to 9.9 percent per 1,000 physicians. The estimated average annual decrease was 6.3 percent for MDs and 5.3 percent for DOs. Meanwhile, the median indemnity, or compensation, amount of paid claims in 2013-adjusted dollars increased 5 percent annually from 1994 to 2007, but since 2007, median indemnity fell by an average of 1.1 percent a year—declining to \$195,000 in 2013.

There were mixed trends in liability premiums paid by doctors. In California, Illinois, and Tennessee, premiums charged by each state's largest [medical malpractice](#) insurer to internists and obstetrician-gynecologists fell 36 percent from 2004 to 2013. Premiums charged to general surgeons decreased 30 percent. Colorado saw a 20 percent drop in premiums for internists, but an 11 percent increase for ob-gyns and a 13 percent rise for general surgeons. In New York, rates charged by the largest insurer rose 12 percent for ob-gyns, 16 percent for internists, and 35 percent for [general surgeons](#).

The authors write that nontraditional malpractice reforms, including communication-and-resolution programs and pre-suit notification and apology laws, look promising. Reform approaches "that accelerate the recognition of errors and the resolution of disputes are likely to further both monetary and nonmonetary goals of malpractice reform," William Sage, M.D., J.D., of the University of Texas at Austin School of Law, writes in an accompanying journal editorial.

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