

Yale Practice

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DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY TO LEAP FORWARD WITH QUALITY



Concern with quality of care has long been a topic of national debate. The issue has lingered for so long that corporate giants have become impatient

waiting for the healthcare system to address the problems themselves. To advance their goals of measuring quality and implementing quality of care systems, member entities have organized themselves into a congressionally chartered group known as The Leapfrog Group.

Composed of more than 140 public and private organizations that provide health care benefits, one of Leapfrog's missions is to prevent medical mistakes during hospitalization. They have taken action by mobilizing employer purchasing power to initiate breakthrough improvements in the safety of health care and by giving consumers information to make more informed hos-

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MALPRACTICE RATES SLAM CLINICAL PRACTICE

Throughout the U.S. physicians are taking down their shingles because they can no longer afford the exorbitant cost of medical practice. What impacts the private practice of medicine is even more adverse in academic clinical practice because of our institutional overhead structure. Malpractice premiums have ballooned out of control. A key contributing factor is increasing litigation and uncapped judgment awards. While the trial lawyer lobby would argue the rates are due to poor management of investments, the facts speak otherwise.



The average jury award is hundreds of thousands of dollars higher than even 5 years ago. In the past, the physicians of Yale Medical Group have enjoyed protection from wide swings in rates by internally adjusting premiums to minimize the impact of external market or judicial forces. "We are now struggling with the impact of skyrocketing rates that threaten the development and growth of our clinical departments," commented David Leffell, Director of YMG.

In an environment where overhead exceeds revenue, overhead reduction by curtailing services is one approach practices have been considering.

YMG's professional liability insurance is provided through MCIC Vermont, Inc., a company formed by several major teaching hospitals to underwrite liability insurance for the hospitals and doctors closely affiliated with the institutions. Yale-New Haven Hospital (YNHH) and Yale University are active participants. Peer members include Johns Hopkins University, Columbia University, Cornell University, New York Presbyterian Hospital and the University of Rochester.

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Janine Evans, MD, Associate Director of Clinical Affairs, stated, "While much of the current malpractice crisis is behaving like a runaway train, YMG is, for the first time, initiating efforts to begin to understand and control our medical risk. A joint risk management/patient safety committee is being formed under the auspices of YMG. The committee is charged with (a) reviewing current departmental risk management practices and making recommendations for improvement (b) reviewing the implementation of risk management initiatives proposed by MCIC and (c) monitoring and reviewing malpractice activity to identify potential problem areas and trends and to recommend solutions.

The committee will meet monthly and will be co-chaired by **Janine Evans, MD**, and **Sarah Cohn**, Director Legal Affairs/Risk Management. Membership will include

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PEDIATRIC ANESTHESIOLOGY TAKES CENTER STAGE

Zeev N. Kain, MD, Professor of Anesthesiology, Pediatrics, and Child Psychiatry, and Anesthesiologist-in-Chief of the Children's Hospital, has been appointed to two major editorial boards, beginning January 1, 2004. The first is as an associate editor of his field's leading journal, *Anesthesiology*, published by the American Society of Anesthesiologists. The current editorial board of 20 is drawn from seven countries on three continents. The second is the editorial board of *Pediatrics*, the official publication of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Kain is the first pediatric anes-



thesiologist to be invited by the Board of Directors of the American Academy of Pediatrics to join the editorial board.

Additionally, Kain has begun a four-year term as a member of the Risk, Prevention and Health Behavior Study Section, Center for Scientific Review at the National Institute of Health.

Please join us in adding your congratulations to Dr. Kain. He may be reached at 785-2802 or zeev.kain@yale.edu.

MALPRACTICE RATES (Continued)

the University, the School, YNHH and YMG with representation from finance, legal, administration and clinical departments.

While the impact of any intervention may not be felt for several years, acting now in ways that are effective may prove beneficial in the long run.

The committee is interested in developing an interdisciplinary focus group to identify areas in clinical practice that have the potential for increased exposure. Anyone interested in participation should contact Janine Evans at janine.evans@yale.edu or 737-2771.

DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY (Continued)

pital choices. Leapfrog publicizes hospital-specific information on procedure outcomes and experience on their website at <http://www.leapfroggroup.org>.

Within our organization, **Robert Udelsman, MD, MBA, FACS**, Chairman, Department of Surgery and Yale-New Haven Hospital, has been examining standards of care for inpatient surgical patients and has found that current standards could be improved. "Surgery hopes to raise the bar and be an example for other departments to follow," explained Udelsman. As a starting point, he is concerned there is not a uniform level of attending physician involvement in the admissions process and in actual patient care. Udelsman continued: "Yale is in an ideal position to set national standards and deliver

MORE GROWTH FOR PEDIATRICS



YMG welcomes **Karen Nead, MD**, Assistant Professor, who joins the Primary Care Center and attends in the Newborn Nursery at Yale-New Haven Hospital. Nead earned her medical degree at the University of Rochester, where she also completed a combined residency in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics. Continuing at Rochester, she completed a fellowship in

world-class care." How does this translate and how do patients benefit? Today, no patient is admitted to surgery without the approval of the attending physician. Trauma/Critical Care surgeons are now available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Surgery guarantees an attending at the bedside within sixty minutes of the phone call, sooner in emergencies. *'If you have a phone, you have a surgeon'* is Surgery's new motto.

"We believe it should be the standard of care at a major institution, and we are hopeful we can deliver and set an example that other departments will follow," reiterated Udelsman. Surgery will measure progress toward the new standards by tracking response times and other metrics as appropriate. Any questions or comments may be directed to Robert Udelsman at 785-2697 or robert.udelsman@yale.edu.

General Pediatrics and is now board certified in Pediatrics. Her special interests are the prevention of pediatric obesity, health care disparities and resident education. Dr. Nead may be reached at 688-2475 or karen.nead@yale.edu.



David M. Spiro, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor, joins Pediatric Emergency Medicine at the Children's Hospital. Spiro earned his medical degree at the University of California, San Francisco. He completed a pediatric residency at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. Spiro spent 5 years in Oregon in pediatric practice working in both a rural community and on a Native American Reservation. He went on to Children's Hospital-University of Alabama to complete a fellowship in Pediatric Emergency Medicine. While at UAB, Spiro also earned an MPH in Epidemiology. He is board certified in Pediatrics and his special interests include health care utilization. Dr. Spiro may be contacted at 688-6747 or david.spiro@yale.edu.

Please join us in welcoming these new faculty members.

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