

A REPORT TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND
THE SENATE AND HOUSE COMMITTEES
ON INSURANCE AND COMMERCE
OF
THE ARKANSAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(AS REQUIRED BY ACT 1007 OF 2003)

ANNUAL STUDY OF MEDICAL MALPRACTICE
INSURANCE MARKET IN ARKANSAS



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REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE ON ACT 1007 OF 2003 ANNUAL STUDY OF MEDICAL MALPRACTICE INSURANCE MARKET IN ARKANSAS

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Act 1007 of 2003 requires the following:

(a) The Insurance Commissioner shall conduct an annual study of malpractice insurance rates in Arkansas and report the findings to the Legislative Council and the chairs of both the House and Senate Interim Committees on Insurance and Commerce.

(b) The study shall include:

- (1) Any findings regarding any changes in medical malpractice rates;*
- (2) Any other finding that is relevant to malpractice insurance rates; and*
- (3) Any recommendations in respect to any law relating to medical malpractice insurance.*

Arkansas has a “competitive rating law” for the medical malpractice line, Ark. Code Ann. § 23-67-201 *et seq.* Rates are approved or disapproved within sixty (60) days after the date of filing, Ark. Code Ann. § 23-67-506(d). The Commissioner is required to use standards for rates promulgated in Ark. Code Ann. § 23-67-502 in determining whether to approve or disapprove a filing. Ark. Code Ann. § 23-67-502 requires that rates shall not be excessive, inadequate or unfairly discriminatory; however, the Commissioner may approve an excessive rate if failure to approve the rate may tend to substantially lessen competition in the Arkansas malpractice insurance market, Ark. Code Ann. § 23-67-506(e).

There are two common misconceptions about the role of the Legislature and Insurance Department regarding insurance rates. The first misconception is that either entity has the ability to control market exits of companies. There is no statutory authority to compel an insurer to provide medical malpractice insurance coverage; furthermore, any law requiring an insurer to do business in Arkansas would be disruptive to the entire marketplace, spilling over into other lines of insurance.

The second misconception concerns the Department’s oversight of rates. Medical malpractice rates must be filed at least sixty (60) days prior to the proposed effective date for use in the state. The Department has broad authority to review how the rate is distributed among insureds according to factors that might predict future losses; we cannot, however, disapprove an overall rate unless it is actuarially “excessive, inadequate or unfairly discriminatory.”

Definitions

- “Excessive.” A rate becomes excessive when the loss ratio (losses, including adjustment expenses and operating expenses, divided by premium paid) drops to a

point which results in the insurance company earning an excessive amount of profit.

- “Inadequate.” A rate is inadequate if it will lead to immediate solvency problems or has the potential for long-term solvency implications in that it may not provide sufficient funds to pay future claims, the costs of adjusting those claims and operating the business.
- “Unfairly Discriminatory.” All insurance discriminates among various risks. There is “fair,” i.e., “legal” discrimination, and “unfair,” i.e., illegal discrimination. “Unfair” discrimination basically means not treating similar risks the same in rates and coverages.

Overall base rates for an insurer are determined by the application of actuarial expertise to the standards set forth in the applicable state law.¹ To this amount is added an expected amount for adjusting claims, distribution or sales expenses, administration, taxes and fees, and defense costs.

An individual insured’s rates are normally established by applying discounts and credits or surcharges/debits to a base rate. Under our law those discounts, credits or surcharges/debits must be such that they “...measure differences among risks that can be demonstrated to have a probable effect upon losses or expenses.”²

¹ 23-67-209. Rating criteria.

(a) Due consideration must be given to past and prospective loss and expense experience within and outside this state, to catastrophe hazards and contingencies, to events or trends within and outside this state, to loadings for leveling rates over a period of time, to dividends or savings to be allowed or returned by insurers to their policyholders, members, or subscribers, and to all other relevant factors. All submissions for rate changes or supplementary rate changes must include this information with Arkansas’ experience shown, as well as companywide experience for the past five (5) years for the class of business which this filing affects. The determination of the weighting of credibility assigned to Arkansas must be fully explained. If, within a particular class, the data is not sufficiently credible for Arkansas or companywide, and common classes are grouped together for rate-making purposes, all class codes utilized in developing credibility shall be shown as an exhibit in the filing, with Arkansas’ experience for each class affected shown separately. If significant trends within the state are utilized, a narrative describing the basis of the trend must be included.

(b) Risks may be classified in any reasonable way for the establishment of rates, except that no risks may be grouped by classifications based in whole or in part on race, color, creed, or national origin of the risk.

(c) The expense provisions included in the rates to be used by any insurer shall reflect the operating methods of the insurer and its actual and anticipated expense experience.

(d) The rates may contain provisions for contingencies and an allowance permitting a reasonable profit. In determining the reasonableness of the profit, consideration must be given to all investment income attributable to premiums and to the reserves associated with those premiums and to loss reserve funds.

² 23-67-210. Rating plans.

(a) Rates may be modified to produce premiums for individual risks in accordance with filed rating plans which establish standards for measuring variations in hazards or expense provisions. Those standards may measure differences among risks that can be demonstrated to have a probable effect upon losses or expenses. The modification shall apply to all risks under the same or substantially the same circumstances or conditions. These modifications are also capped at +/- 25%.

Typical characteristics used to measure those differences may include:

- Medical specialty involved, including multiple practice characteristics
- Claims defense and history of paid claims and amount of payment
- Exposures - number of patients
- Emergency room practice
- Length of time in practice
- Location of practice
- Implementation of risk management practices
- Staff size and training
- Continuing education
- Board Certification

The most basic factor affecting availability for an individual seeking medical malpractice coverage is whether they meet the underwriting criteria of the insurer. Some underwriting concerns include:

- Professional sanctions
- Nursing home affiliation
- Willingness to implement risk management procedures
- Type of claims - severity and certainty of negligent conduct

FINDINGS

Three (3) filings in the medical malpractice line of insurance were made with the Arkansas Insurance Department during this past reporting period:

- One (1) became effective as filed;
- One (1) covered only class changes with no rate impact; and
- One (1) was an initial filing for a new company entering the market.

Each filing is subject to the normal rate review for excessive, inadequate, or unfairly discriminatory levels, as well as the other statutory requirements set forth in Ark Code Ann. § 23-67-201 *et seq.* Filings that trigger concerns about excessive or inadequate rates or that contain significant increases are referred to an actuary. While the companies provide actuarial justification as part of the filing, the Department's actuary may require additional supporting documentation as a part of his review.

Impact statements regarding the affect of Act 649 of 2003 are filed pursuant to Bulletin 2-2003 that was promulgated as a result of the passage of the Act, which dealt with certain procedural and substantive issues in the state's tort system.

Arkansas still has a limited number of companies actually writing new medical malpractice liability policies. Currently, there are nine (9) companies with policyholders, an increase over the eight (8) listed in the 2006 report. They are:

American Casualty of Reading, PA (nurses only)
The Doctors Company, an Interinsurance Exchange
First Professionals Insurance Company
Medical Protective Company
Medical Assurance Company, Inc.
Podiatry Insurance Company of America (podiatrists only)
Preferred Professional Insurance Company
State Volunteer Mutual Insurance Company
Louisiana Medical Mutual Insurance Company (LAMMICO) **(NEW)**

Continental Casualty is only renewing existing business.

Since August 1, 2006, the following rate actions have occurred:

COMPANY	EFFECTIVE DATE	OVERALL CHANGE	SPECIALTIES AFFECTED	DISPOSITION
State Volunteer Mutual	5/15/2007	3.5% Increase	Physicians and Surgeons	Approved
Louisiana Medical Mutual Insurance Company	1/1/2007	Initial Filing	Physicians, Surgeons, and Allied Health	Approved
The Medical Protective Company	8/22/2006	No Change	Physicians	Approved

Our review of recent rate filings has indicated that existing rates for the companies in question are approaching adequacy and that the requested rate level change did not create statutorily excessive rate levels. We did not find anything in the filings that resulted in unfair discrimination between similar risks. Each filing complied with Ark. Code Ann. § 23-67-201 *et seq.* at the time of filing.

The aggregate loss and lost adjustment expense (“LAE”) ratio for Arkansas for 2006 was 61.99%. The aggregate pure loss ratio³ for the line was 37.23%. The aggregate LAE for the line was 24.76%. This is much better than in recent years. Act 649 of 2003 has only been in effect since March 25, 2003, so it would still be premature to expect it to have had a significant impact on rates, as almost all data submitted to justify the rate actions are based upon pre-act claims or extremely young reserving data for long tail claims. Further, Act 649 could be challenged in the courts and that uncertainty is taken into consideration by companies. The lower loss ratio is probably attributable to premium increases of the past few

³ “Pure loss ratio” is simply the ratio of losses incurred compared to premium earned. It does not contain LAE or other costs of operation or defense.

years driven by extremely high loss prior to 2004.

The ratios above are for the entire market and include many adjustments made by companies that are presently not writing the coverage and are, therefore, not reflective of current experience. When you examine the results of only those companies writing the coverage you see different results. For this group, the aggregate loss and lost adjustment expense (“LAE”) ratio for Arkansas for 2006 was 82.48%. The aggregate pure loss ratio for the line was 49.66%. The aggregate LAE for the line was 32.82%.

Loss adjustment expenses and the cost of defense are still significantly higher in the medical malpractice line than in other lines of insurance. A significant portion of medical malpractice premiums is derived from the cost to investigate and defend claims (even when a claimant abandons a claim, loses in court or prevails). Due to the nature of the claim, expert witnesses are needed (which are other medical professionals) and highly specialized litigation counsel is often required. Sometimes the cost of defending a claim can equal or exceed the amount paid in judgments or settlements. Providing a defense is both an obligation of the insurance company and a benefit to the insured medical provider. The following table presents a comparison of medical malpractice loss and expense ratios as compared to commercial liability coverage and private passenger auto liability coverage.

YEAR	2006			2005		
Line of Insurance	Medical Malpractice	Commercial Multi Peril (Liability Portion)	Private Passenger Auto Liability	Medical Malpractice	Commercial Multi Peril (Liability Portion)	Private Passenger Auto Liability
Pure Loss Ratio	37.23%	43.21%	58.27%	57.13%	34.02%	59.41%
DCCE ⁴ Ratio	24.76%	14.19%	1.66%	24.23%	10.48%	2.72%
Pure plus DCCE	61.99%	57.39%	59.33%	81.36%	44.50%	62.13%

YEAR	2004			2003		
Line of Insurance	Medical Malpractice	Commercial Multi Peril (Liability Portion)	Private Passenger Auto Liability	Medical Malpractice	Commercial Multi Peril (Liability Portion)	Private Passenger Auto Liability
Pure Loss Ratio	69.16%	46.60%	62.91%	101.47%	39.42%	63.17%
DCCE Ratio	28.47%	13.87%	2.70%	31.05%	12.28%	2.54%
Pure plus DCCE	97.63%	60.47%	65.61%	132.52%	51.70%	65.71%

⁴ “DCCE” is Defense and Cost Containment Expense.” This number includes LAE, costs related to the defense of a claim and any other costs related to the containment of the loss. It does not contain expenses relating to general operating expenses, for sale of the product, or taxes.

CONCLUSION

Since the passage of Acts 1007 and 649 of 2003, the number of filings for companies actively writing insurance in the medical malpractice market has slowed. In the 12 months since the last report, the filings resulted in small overall increases of less than 3.5%. Given the loss ratios for 2006, the market appears to be approaching or may even have achieved rate adequacy. Its performance during 2006 was fairly close to other liability lines. However, when you only consider the companies actively soliciting business the results are not as favorable. In fact, when you consider selling and operating expenses of the companies the combined ratio for those active companies is probably still in excess of 100%.

Loss ratios for those companies actively writing new business remain high when compared to other liability lines, but continue to improve. Due to the specialized nature of litigation in this area, claims investigation, adjustment and defense costs are, on average, substantially higher than for other liability lines. It appears that for those insurers actively pursuing new business, the effects of Act 649 of 2003 may be having a positive effect on their outlook for the future. The impact statements, however, still express a very conservative approach to the Act's long term effect. Current rates continue to predominately reflect claims and litigation prior to the effective date of the Act but now should include some estimate of the reserves for years since the effective date of the Act. Moreover, the medical malpractice market can still be adversely affected by a judicial repeal in whole or part of Act 649 of 2003.

Repeal of all or a portion of Act 649 of 2003 in a future legislative session will make Arkansas less attractive to those remaining companies providing medical malpractice coverage to Arkansas's medical community. The loss of even one more medical malpractice insurer will result in significant declines in both availability and affordability of coverage for the medical community.

Prepared August 10, 2007.

cc: The Honorable Mike Beebe, C/O James Miller, Regulatory Liaison
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