

Lake Forest Hospital calls for legislative action to solve medical liability crisis

LAKE FOREST — Lake Forest Hospital President William Ries has announced a new solution to the medical liability crisis in Illinois — one that ensures lifelong care for patients through Patient Care Funds while providing reasonable, rational medical liability reform to help hospitals continue caring in the community.

The Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Patients program proposed by the Illinois Hospital Association and Lake Forest Hospital supports legislation currently under review by state lawmakers. The proposal includes:

- Reasonable caps on non-economic medical liability damages.
- Scheduled award payments to patients.
- Rational reform so hospitals are held not liable for medical errors, which they did not cause.

With the plan, Ries said the General Assembly can instill “some sanity in the system.”

Across the country, 28 out of 50 states have passed some form of medical liability reform. Illinois is one of 20 states named by the American Medical Association as a “state in crisis,” where medical care is seriously jeopardized by the medical liability crisis.

“We need a solution that addresses the long-term medical needs of injured patients,” Ries said.

“Unfortunately, there has been a real shortage of viable solutions because no one can agree on anything. You have trial lawyers pitted against doctors, insurance companies and hospitals. Nothing has been solved and in the meantime, patients are lost in the equation.”

Ries added, “At Lake Forest Hospital, we have had to resort to self-insurance to shield ourselves from the astronomical costs of liability verdicts. Without caps on non-economic damages, money that could be better spent on patient care or technological improvements is instead allocated to liability payments and self-insurance plans.”

The proposed Patient Care Funds would schedule payments of jury awards for damages over the course of the plaintiff’s lifetime — ensuring that he or she never lacks the necessary funds to pay for his or her medical needs.

“If hospitals can pay jury awards through scheduled payments, rather than a lump sum, they can stay in the business of keeping patients healthy,” IHA President Ken Robbins said.

“We urge the Illinois General Assembly to act now to bring some common sense to the system and help us serve our communities,” Ries said.