

Physicians exodus increases ^[1]

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Calificación:



By Marga Parés Arroyo / End.mpares@elnuevodia.com ^[2] endi.com ^[3] Since 2003, the number of specialists that for diverse reasons has immigrated to the US to practice has duplicated. Statistics from the College of Medical Surgeons indicate that in the 2003, about 433 doctors left the country, 512 in the 2004 and by June 2006, the number was 819. The president of the College of Medical Surgeons of Puerto Rico, Marissel Velazquez, recognized that although the exodus of doctors to the north is not a new problem, she calls attention to the noticeable increase. "Many people don't get the medical services they need, particularly near their houses, which makes Centro Medico (UPR's Medical Center), in many occasions the only option", said the doctor, who emphasized that although at they have 10,119 members, only 8,941 practices in the Island. She said that although all the population is affected, the most vulnerable are the pediatrics patients, because if a high risk complication arises, the only specialists who take care of this kind of cases are in Centro Medico. This is because, being a public institution, is covered by the State immunity that protects them against medical malpractice lawsuits. According to the doctor, medical malpractice lawsuits is one of the reasons for the exodus, since states like Florida, no insurance is needed to practice. On the other hand, Luis González Colon, president of the Physicians Licensing Court,

indicated that the Health Reform - with which many residency programs were lost- and the economical situation are additional causes for the exodus. The difficulty to obtain well remunerated jobs is also cause for the emigration. In the last years the specialized companies have increased the recruitment of Spanish-speaking doctors. Also, many students do their residencies or specialties in US and decide to stay. "We are short of specialists and we do not have enough residencies to fill the gaps because, with the Health Reform and the privatization of some government medical facilities many residencies were lost", said doctor Velazquez, who denounced in addition that half to the doctors who do their residencies abroad do not return to the country. Another factor is the little increase in the payments from medical insurance as compared to the significant increase in the premiums: 3% versus 300%, respectively. Luz Teresa Amador, Attorney of the Patient, agreed in the adverse effect of this exodus. "If every day we lose specialists, health will get more and more affected. One of the groups that will be more affected is high risk-pregnant women. We are living a difficult situation and its necessary to look for alternatives", she said. She mentioned the example of a complaint about a boy who was born with twisted testicles and there was no a pediatric urologist to take care of it on time. "Those cases usually referred to the Pediatric Hospital and, if not attended within the first six hours, the boy loses the testicles", she affirmed dramatically. The secretary of Health, Rosa Perez Perdomo, said that economical reasons are a factor for the losses of health professionals. "Basically, that exodus is due to great differences in wages. When you look at what a health care professional in the US earns (in the public system) is not comparable with what we are paying here". She said that the phenomenon occurs in the public and private sector. On the other hand, Velazquez indicated that obstetricians are the specialists that have moved the most. She said that while in 1994 there were 520 obstetricians in the country, at the moment only 250 are left, making them attend of up to 50 childbirths a month, instead of the recommended 12.

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