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NEWS RELEASE

For Release
February 10, 2004

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Consumer Groups and Victims Protest Effort by Richest Doctors in America to Take Away Patients' Rights

Some of the highest-paid doctor specialists in the country are asking Congress to enact severe restrictions on the legal rights of medical malpractice patients, according to Joanne Doroshow, Executive Director of the nonprofit, nonpartisan Center for Justice & Democracy.

According to Doroshow, "After failing in their bid in July 2003 to severely limit the rights of injured patients, doctors representing the highest paid occupations in the country, such as orthopedic surgeons and cardiologists, are now targeting federal lawmakers in seven states with a multi-million dollar advertising campaign. They are once again trying to limit their liability for malpractice. Yet the average *annual salary* of these doctors is more than the *lifetime* limit they want to impose on catastrophically-injured patients, including children, to compensate them for their suffering."

Doctors say they are targeting the following seven states with a multi-million dollar advertising blitz: Florida, Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Washington State.

According to Anna Bridgers, Coordinator of the North Carolina Coalition for Patients' Rights, "North Carolina has a low number of medical malpractice cases, conservative juries, low medical malpractice premiums, and one of the fastest growing populations of physicians of any state in the country. Our state has for the last three years been ranked the best business climate in the country and this year was cited for the most desirable communities in which to practice medicine. Yet a national group of wealthy doctors initiates an effort to strip patients of their rights in our state with the outrageous label of 'Protect Patients Now.' Such a group has no business pushing its misinformation here."

"People who *live* after becoming a victim of malpractice are changed forever," said John Wayne Portch of Boca Raton, Florida, who was a victim of medical malpractice in January 1999. "I lost both of my legs below the knee, four fingers and got a very changed life. Our rights should not be taken from us. Insurance companies need to be investigated."

Lauren Townsend, Executive Director of Citizens for Consumer Justice, based in Pennsylvania, said, “Doctors need to focus on the real reasons why they are paying more and more for insurance -- the weak economy, dropping interest rates and corporate irresponsibility by the insurance industry. Only strong reforms of the insurance industry will solve this problem.”

“If you want to lower the cost of medical malpractice insurance, lower the incidence of malpractice,” said Dylan Malone of Washington State, whose son, Ian, sustained severe injuries at birth. “My son was injured by a doctor who has hurt others before, and others since, and he continues to practice. A small fraction of doctors cause the lion’s share of injuries. Address that and you make healthcare safer and more affordable in one stroke.”

Sherry Keller of Georgia said, “For me, a cacophony of errors, and purposeful negligence, led to spinal cord injury and paralysis. I would gladly give up any and all money to be able to walk normally again, not mentioning the plethora of other health issues that accompanies spinal cord injury, and the constant pain. Capping the awards given by a jury of my peers, whom we also trust to decide the death penalty, is not the answer. As proven in states where the cap laws already exist, it does nothing to reduce the physicians’ rates and burdens.”

According to Geoff Boehm, Legal Director of the Center for Justice & Democracy, “These doctors are seeking to broadly restrict the constitutional rights of all American citizens to go to court while weakening the system’s ability to prevent medical errors. Their solutions will hurt the most severely injured Americans, such as seniors in nursing homes, quadriplegic workers and brain-damaged children, while doing nothing to help doctors who are being price-gouged by insurance companies.”

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