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I went into medicine because I wanted to help people and serve the Lord. Indeed over my years in practice I have been blessed with a wonderful opportunity to love and serve the people of Nevada. The joy that I have received from this service is immeasurable and has made my life rich. However, you who sit on this committee, the members of this legislature can barely imagine the stress that I have been forced to deal with, the depression that these conditions have created in my life and in the life of my family.

As I approach 50, this stress is literally beating the joy out of practicing medicine in Nevada. I said it last year to Barbara Buckley's subcommittee and I will tell you again I don't know if it is possible for me to continue much longer. However, I may not need to make that decision, in two months when I am up for renewal of my malpractice insurance there is a strong possibility that I may not be able to purchase insurance at any price that I can afford due to two frivolous claims that have been brought against me, since the passage of the state's tort reform last year. I, like my colleagues, may just be forced to close my doors.

The last time that I spoke there were just a few physicians that had closed their doors. I shared with Ms. Buckley's subcommittee the stories of several of these physicians. Now despite the controversy in the media I am here to testify that numerous others have closed their practice.

One of the first was Dr. Stacey Rivers who had been practicing in Nevada for more than 10 years. She found that she could not pay her bills. She was not taking any paychecks. She would not be able to meet her cost of living if not for her husband. Finally, her quality of life was so bad that she quit practicing, leaving thousands of women to find another physician. With the controversy in the media, I must mention that she may still be listed as a physician licensed to practice in Nevada. The fact is that she is no longer a practicing OB/GYN. She is working with CIGNA in medical management. She only works 40 hours a week and says that it is like being on vacation. She no longer lives in fear of a lawsuit destroying her career and life. She spends time with her children. She misses her practice, but not the incredible stress that the current environment in Nevada has created.

Dr. Maloney, another Las Vegas' very busy female practitioners, started practicing in 1993. She has told me that she is simply not willing to see 40 patients a day, working under such stressful conditions. She informed me that her son-in-law, 23 years old, with no graduate education made more money than she did last year as a plumber, without any of the headaches. She said that she really did enjoy obstetrics, but that the joy of practicing was beat out of her.

Dr. Cheryl Edwards has been practicing for about 10 years, an incredibly busy physician, unable to make it in this environment. She had to leave her family, a mother with terminal breast cancer, in order to find employment. Her story has been featured in Readers Digest and other periodicals, describing the ordeal of practicing in this state.

Dr. Summerville last year stated that he was faced with the decision to give up obstetrics, "a field that I love and have trained for many arduous years to do. At a relatively young age of 39, I have many productive years left.... All said and done, if my rates become unaffordable or if I or my family become too wary of working in a profession where jury awards are now increasingly well above a physician's insurance limits, I will quit!" And, quit he did this past January, ending a short career that he loved.

Dr. Darren Houssel who was associated with Dr. Maloney and shared a very busy practice in Henderson continued practicing a short while after Dr. Maloney's departure. Shortly thereafter he found that he simply could not afford to stay in practice, and has quit.

Dr. William Bossack who trained with me at Cedars Sinai in Los Angeles recently closed his 20+ year practice. Dr. Bossack, like the rest of us, struggled with economics of practicing medicine. He refused to ever take any managed care contracts due to their inadequate and oftentimes non-reimbursement for services. Yet, he was able to survive until relatively recently, until the soaring malpractice rates finally forced him to close his doors. In addition, he stated that "in our profession the nature of our work is that we are forced to address one crisis after another crisis." He said that the accumulated stress by midday was simply too much for him. He suffered from high blood pressure and incapacitating headaches. Since quitting, his blood pressure is in control, without the headaches. I will miss this colleague dearly.

Dr. Mark Henderson, a specialist in GYN urology, left Nevada recently.

Dr. Paul Chao

one of many thanks to leave

Dr. Shelly Wilbourn now resides in Maine after leaving practice here last year. As you know he testified before the US Congress stating that he left Nevada "because of the litigious climate that had driven the medical liability premiums to astronomical heights." No more need be said since you listened to his testimony yesterday.

Dr. Gloria Martin and Dr. Yakitas started their practice only a couple of years ago with a great enthusiasm. They did everything possible to build a practice, including walking from door to door, introducing themselves as new physicians. Their practice grew, when suddenly their dreams were dashed by the current crisis. And, they both were forced out. They calculated that in order to stay in business that they would each have to see 60 patients a day but felt that it was not humanly possible. Dr Yakitas is currently on staff at the medical school. She is another example of someone who may not be listed as having left. The same is true of Dr. Gloria Martin. They are perfect examples of the dying breed of private practitioners in Nevada. And, good examples of how polls don't tell the story.