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How tough is life? One state has the facts and figures

A Massachusetts Medical Society analysis reveals that the physician practice environment is worsening as salaries fail to keep pace with inflation and costs.

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NEWS STAFF

MANY PHYSICIAN BELIEVE THEIR LIVES HAVE GOTTEN harder. But doctors in one state have actually quantified their troubles.

The Massachusetts Medical Society, in a recently released survey, found that the cost of running a practice is climbing, doctors are working longer hours, physician salaries are declining, housing is becoming more expensive and the percentage of practicing physicians older than 45 is increasing.

By the society's measures, the physician practice environment decreased in quality an average of 1.8% annually from 1992 to 1996, then deteriorated more quickly, at a rate of 4.6%, from 1997 to 2000. The indicators dropped 7.2% between 1999 and 2000 alone.

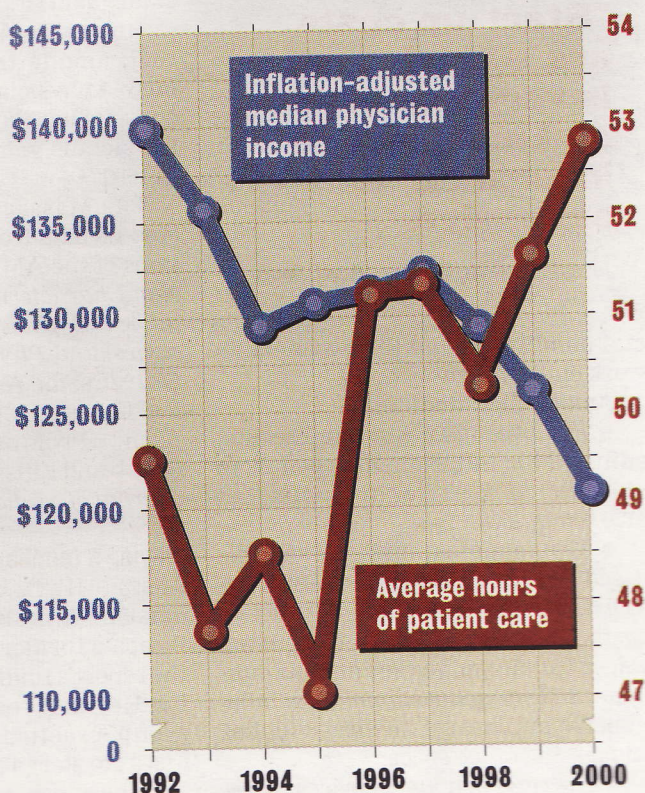
Ob-gyn Mary Danca, MD, got so frustrated with conditions in Massachusetts that she moved to New Hampshire.

"Some of the reasons for my move were the exact reasons mentioned in the report," said Dr. Danca, who now is on the faculty of the family practice residency program at Concord Hospital in Concord, N.H.

Doctors living along either the East or West coasts could be in a similar predicament. Physicians who live in those regions face a harsher, more competitive practice environment than do physicians who settle in the Midwest

TROUBLING NUMBERS

Two of the indicators from the Massachusetts Medical Society Physician Practice Environment Index show deterioration at a quicker pace in recent years.



NOTE: FIGURES FOR THE 1999 PHYSICIAN INCOME, AND ALL FIGURES FOR 2000, ARE ESTIMATES
SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT INDEX REPORT, JULY

and South, said Geoff Staub, director of marketing for the physician recruiting firm Cejka & Co. in St. Louis.

For one thing, managed care is less prevalent in those regions than on the coasts, he said.

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Debt deadbeats risk losing medical licenses

A growing number of state medical boards are stepping up their efforts to collect delinquent state and federal loans. such service obligations as practicing in underserved areas in exchange for loan forgiveness. The tone of disci-

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