

Clock ticking for Conn. med malpractice special session

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by Pat Healy
InsuranceTimes

HARTFORD — This week is a pivotal one for the state's medical malpractice crisis. Doctors and lawyers alike are waiting to hear if state lawmakers will call a special session to resolve the crisis before the expected rate increase at the beginning of next month.

Today, Sept. 16 will be the first release of information from the Legislative Program Review Committee in the form of a preliminary report. On Thursday, Sept. 18 a public hearing will be held to see if the special session will happen or if it will be put aside until January.

"This would be very unfortunate if they waited until January," said Denise A. Funk, executive vice president and CEO of Glastonbury-based Connecticut Medical Insurance Co.

One of the chief reasons Funk and others in the industry think this would be unfortunate is that most physicians have to renew their policies before January so without a special session the higher rates would be in place upon renewal.

Lobbying for a \$250,000 cap on non-economic damage awards from juries, doctors throughout the state are hoping to convince legislators that the state is in crisis mode.

Funk said she hopes the decision will be an obvious one.

"Are we in need of emergency session? Without question. This is an emergency," she said.

Others are a bit more cynical that an emergency session will be called.

"These people just finished the budget," said Executive Vice President of the Independent Insurance Agents of Connecticut Warren Ruppap, with a slight laugh. "They don't want to talk to each other again right now." □