

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2008 SESSION

CHAPTER 205

An Act to amend and reenact §§ 8.01-581.1 and 8.01-581.20 of the Code of Virginia, relating to medical malpractice; professional services.

[S 602]

Approved March 3, 2008

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 8.01-581.1 and 8.01-581.20 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 8.01-581.1. Definitions.

As used in this chapter:

"Health care" means any act, *professional services in nursing homes*, or treatment performed or furnished, or which should have been performed or furnished, by any health care provider for, to, or on behalf of a patient during the patient's medical diagnosis, care, treatment or confinement.

"Health care provider" means (i) a person, corporation, facility or institution licensed by this Commonwealth to provide health care or professional services as a physician or hospital, dentist, pharmacist, registered nurse or licensed practical nurse or a person who holds a multistate privilege to practice such nursing under the Nurse Licensure Compact, optometrist, podiatrist, chiropractor, physical therapist, physical therapy assistant, clinical psychologist, clinical social worker, professional counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist, licensed dental hygienist, health maintenance organization, or emergency medical care attendant or technician who provides services on a fee basis; (ii) a professional corporation, all of whose shareholders or members are so licensed; (iii) a partnership, all of whose partners are so licensed; (iv) a nursing home as defined in § 54.1-3100 except those nursing institutions conducted by and for those who rely upon treatment by spiritual means alone through prayer in accordance with a recognized church or religious denomination; (v) a professional limited liability company comprised of members as described in subdivision A 2 of § 13.1-1102; (vi) a corporation, partnership, limited liability company or any other entity, except a state-operated facility, which employs or engages a licensed health care provider and which primarily renders health care services; or (vii) a director, officer, employee, independent contractor, or agent of the persons or entities referenced herein, acting within the course and scope of his employment or engagement as related to health care or professional services.

"Health maintenance organization" means any person licensed pursuant to Chapter 43 (§ 38.2-4300 et seq.) of Title 38.2 who undertakes to provide or arrange for one or more health care plans.

"Hospital" means a public or private institution licensed pursuant to Chapter 5 (§ 32.1-123 et seq.) of Title 32.1 or Article 2 (§ 37.2-403 et seq.) of Chapter 4 of Title 37.2.

"Impartial attorney" means an attorney who has not represented (i) the claimant, his family, his partners, co-proprietors or his other business interests; or (ii) the health care provider, his family, his partners, co-proprietors or his other business interests.

"Impartial health care provider" means a health care provider who (i) has not examined, treated or been consulted regarding the claimant or his family; (ii) does not anticipate examining, treating, or being consulted regarding the claimant or his family; or (iii) has not been an employee, partner or co-proprietor of the health care provider against whom the claim is asserted.

"Malpractice" means any tort action or breach of contract action for personal injuries or wrongful death, based on health care or professional services rendered, or which should have been rendered, by a health care provider, to a patient.

"Patient" means any natural person who receives or should have received health care from a licensed health care provider except those persons who are given health care in an emergency situation which exempts the health care provider from liability for his emergency services in accordance with § 8.01-225.

"Physician" means a person licensed to practice medicine or osteopathy in this Commonwealth pursuant to Chapter 29 (§ 54.1-2900 et seq.) of Title 54.1.

"Professional services in nursing homes" means services provided in a nursing home, as that term is defined in clause (iv) of the definition of health care provider in this section, by a health care provider related to health care, staffing to provide patient care, psycho-social services, personal hygiene, hydration, nutrition, fall assessments or interventions, patient monitoring, prevention and treatment of medical conditions, diagnosis or therapy.

§ 8.01-581.20. Standard of care in proceeding before medical malpractice review panel; expert testimony; determination of standard in action for damages.

A. In any proceeding before a medical malpractice review panel or in any action against a physician,

clinical psychologist, podiatrist, dentist, nurse, hospital or other health care provider to recover damages alleged to have been caused by medical malpractice where the acts or omissions so complained of are alleged to have occurred in this Commonwealth, the standard of care by which the acts or omissions are to be judged shall be that degree of skill and diligence practiced by a reasonably prudent practitioner in the field of practice or specialty in this Commonwealth and the testimony of an expert witness, otherwise qualified, as to such standard of care, shall be admitted; provided, however, that the standard of care in the locality or in similar localities in which the alleged act or omission occurred shall be applied if any party shall prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the health care services and health care facilities available in the locality and the customary practices in such locality or similar localities give rise to a standard of care which is more appropriate than a statewide standard. Any physician who is licensed to practice in Virginia shall be presumed to know the statewide standard of care in the specialty or field of medicine in which he is qualified and certified. This presumption shall also apply to any physician who is licensed in some other state of the United States and meets the educational and examination requirements for licensure in Virginia. An expert witness who is familiar with the statewide standard of care shall not have his testimony excluded on the ground that he does not practice in this Commonwealth. A witness shall be qualified to testify as an expert on the standard of care if he demonstrates expert knowledge of the standards of the defendant's specialty and of what conduct conforms or fails to conform to those standards and if he has had active clinical practice in either the defendant's specialty or a related field of medicine within one year of the date of the alleged act or omission forming the basis of the action.

The provisions of this section shall apply to expert witnesses testifying on the standard of care as it relates to professional services in nursing homes.

B. In any action for damages resulting from medical malpractice, any issue as to the standard of care to be applied shall be determined by the jury, or the court trying the case without a jury.

C. In any action described in this section, each party may designate, identify or call to testify at trial no more than two expert witnesses per medical discipline on any issue presented. The court may permit a party, for good cause shown, to designate, identify, or call to testify at trial additional expert witnesses. The number of treating health care providers who may serve as expert witnesses pursuant to § 8.01-399 shall not be limited pursuant to this subsection, except for good cause shown. If the court permits a party to designate, identify, or call additional experts, the court may order that party to pay all costs incurred in the discovery of such additional experts. For good cause shown, pursuant to the Rules of Supreme Court of Virginia, the court may limit the number of expert witnesses other than those identified in this subsection whom a party may designate, identify, or call to testify at trial.