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High Cost, Low Pay Makes MDs Unhappy



SAN FRANCISCO (KRON)--A recent survey shows that Bay Area doctors are increasingly unhappy and that it could have dire consequences for your medical care.

It all boils down to simple economics. Bay Area doctors say they are earning less and life here is costing more. That is adding up to a growing sense of frustration and fewer doctors being willing to practice here.

Neurosurgeon Doctor Donald Prolo has lived and practiced in Santa Clara county nearly all his life. But he says health care in the county is in deep trouble.

Dr. Donald Prolo, San Jose neurosurgeon says, "It makes me feel sad because even now we have a superb community of physicians and I see signs that it's being decimated."

The reasons are simple- many doctors are finding it too expensive to practice. Bill Parrish, Santa Clara Co. Medical Association agrees: "You got [sic] all the factors here for the perfect storm, you got [sic] low reimbursement, combined with high costs and high demand."

Bill Parrish is the Executive Director of the Santa Clara County Medical Association. The organization surveyed doctors in the county and found 95% were worried about the amount they were reimbursed by managed care and medicare compared to the high cost of living and working in the area. 98% agreed that the imbalance affects the quality of care and availability of doctors. 85% said it was making it very hard to attract new doctors to the county.

Those findings were echoed statewide in a report by the California Medical Association ominously titled "And Then There Were None: The Coming Physician Supply Problem". It's a shortage that could have serious consequences for patients. Bill Parrish emphasizes the urgency of the situation: "It's my problem, it is your problem, it is anyone who chooses to live here's problem."

Dr. Donald Prolo says, "The consequences in my field of neurosurgery are that a person will end up in the hospital without a neurosurgeon, is going to be looking for care and transferred to a hospital where there is one, this delays care and can result in permanent injury or death."

It's not just a question of money. Doctors are spending less time with patients and getting less satisfaction from their jobs.

Almost two thirds of those surveyed say if they were starting their careers again they would chose not to practice in Santa Clara County, and those feelings are echoed in other surveys around the Bay Area and California.

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