Why Physicians Should Practice Medicine in Wisconsin

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By Keith L. Martin [3]

Internist Timothy McAvoy shares his perspective on practicing medicine in the state of Wisconsin.

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It's not surprising that while watching more than two feet of snow fall in Boston, a physician would strongly consider a change of location.

Perhaps it is surprising that for internist Timothy McAvoy, that change of location was Waukesha, Wisc.

It was during the "Blizzard of 1978," when the Northeast was pounded with record snowfall, that McAvoy, with one more year left in his residency, received a call from his brother that his namesake and nephew just entered the world in Wisconsin. He completed his residency at the University of Wisconsin, spent three more years in Boston, and then decided to open his own practice in the Badger State. He's called the state home for 30 years now.

In addition to running his solo practice, McAvoy, 65, currently serves as the president of the Wisconsin Medical Society and is vice chair of the AMA's Private Practice Physicians' Caucus.

For you, what is the best part of practicing medicine in the state of Wisconsin?

It's my patients. I have wonderful, wonderful patients. This is a superb state with great people. It is a true pleasure and honor to be allowed to practice medicine in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin is a great state with a great liberal and even socialist tradition in which doctors are honored by our patients. We are not anywhere near the adversarial relationship that many other states have. We've been blessed. We were the state that first gave women the right to vote, first gave people workers' compensation, [etc.] … Doctors are very well respected here in the state, and patients are very appreciative of the efforts we make for them.

There is also the foresight to establish the Wisconsin Injured Patients and Family Compensation Fund [providing excess medical malpractice coverage to physicians to ensure funds are available for injured patients]. We were one of the first states with that.

Personally, Wisconsin is an outstanding place to raise a family. Coming out here [in 1983], I was unmarried, and found a beautiful woman and we have five children. … The quality of life is wonderful and you've got all the accoutrements you would like of gracious living.

What, if anything, would you change about the climate for physicians in Wisconsin?

I think, number one on my list, would be more malpractice reform. If legislators are open to more malpractice reform — they've strengthened peer review — practicing would be very easy. We recently had a court challenge to the caps of our [state-employed] University of Wisconsin doctors, which are truly outstanding caps and it would be great to see further malpractice reform. We are in a very good place with that, but you never can do too much with tort reform.

My biggest issue for improving practice in Wisconsin, however, is getting more doctors here to help us. We have [studies] on the workforce, and like everyone else, there's a need for more doctors. Medical schools are ramping up projects for both rural health and urban health and planning on opening up satellite, three-year programs in Green Bay and in Wausau, Wisc.
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