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The study, led by researchers at Stanford University and the University of Melbourne, asserts that a substantial share of all medical liability claims in the United States is attributable to a small number of physicians.

“We commend the efforts of these researchers to explore ways to improve patient safety and the delivery of medical care,” stated PIAA President and CEO Brian K. Atchinson. “We believe, however, that there are many variables that play a role in the distribution of MPL claims that the study fails to address. In doing so, it leaves a false impression that those healthcare professionals who are subject to more lawsuits are providing negligent care.”

“We know that certain specialties—such as neurosurgery, obstetrics and gynecology, and others—have been linked with a higher frequency of claims,” Atchinson continued. “These doctors experience more claims because of the risk associated with their particular specialty, and not because they are inherently prone to making mistakes more often than their colleagues.”

“These physicians have chosen to take on some of the highest risks and the most complicated cases,” Atchinson said. “For this reason, they may be more vulnerable to suboptimal outcome, stemming from the very nature of their advanced level of practice.”

PIAA’s Vice President of Research and Risk Management, P. Divya Parikh, said that the source of the data used in the study also affects its rigor. “The National Practitioner Data Bank, while accurate in the information it collects, is unable to capture complete data on MPL claims. This underreporting to the NPDB limits the conclusions that one can draw from using such a data set.”

“Studies have shown that all physicians are likely to be named in at least one medical liability claim during the course of their career—with some subject to more based on their specialty,” said Parikh. “Thus, this study hasn’t really revealed anything we didn’t already know.”

“We believe the findings of this study are not conclusive, and so we encourage the continued exploration of all of the factors that can help in advancing the provision of safe, quality healthcare,” stated Atchinson.

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PIAA is the nation’s leading association representing medical professional liability insurance companies, risk retention groups, captives, trusts, and other entities with a commitment to the quality delivery of healthcare. PIAA members insure more than 2 million healthcare professionals around the world—doctors, dentists, nurses and nurse practitioners, and other healthcare providers—including more than two-thirds of America’s private practicing physicians. PIAA members also insure more than 2,000 hospitals and 8,000 medical facilities.