

Returning Control with EMPAC RRG “It’s Not Rocket Science.”

by Tobey Williams Jr., MD

AAEM has a historically short but dynamic history of returning control of our specialty back to EM physicians. The premise of understanding the business and politics behind our practices has been front and center in the mission. One of our problems has been the loss of control and decision making which we as a specialty have almost willingly, and in most cases unknowingly turned over. Over the past years we have awoken to find ourselves servants to large corporations, or even small entities where we don’t have a clue as to where our profits are going. Nor are we conscious of many of the decisions made that directly affect us.

The Vision Statement of AAEM establishes that the welfare of our patients and the brightest future for emergency medicine depends upon restoring control of our practices to emergency physicians. In my years of involvement in AAEM this organization has always, in my opinion, “walked the walk and not just talked the talk.” For several years the Academy has been interested in solutions to the medical malpractice problems that our specialty has been facing. In the spirit of “for EM physicians by EM physicians,” Emergency Medicine Professional Assurance Company Risk Retention Group (EMPAC RRG) was formed and licensed on June 26, 2004. This process was a two-year endeavor that was inspired by the principles that AAEM attempts to instill in every member of the academy towards the future benefit of our specialty.


EMPAC RRG is a single specialty physician owned insurance company exclusive to emergency medicine. This means that the policyholders are the owners of the company, and there is a Board of Directors that oversees and governs the RRG. This Board of Directors is elected from the policyholders and is advised by the nation’s leading experts in the fields of alternative insurance markets and Department of Insurance regulations. These insurance experts join together with practicing EM physicians to form a solid leadership structure.

Inspired by a creative business plan and driven by the dedication and passion towards the concept of returning control to our specialty, EMPAC RRG was able to obtain Lloyds of London to reinsure the program. With this strong A-rated reinsurance relationship, EMPAC RRG ably provides what our specialty demands: outlets to be innovative and creative in our efforts to significantly improve and enhance patient safety process and protocols. EMPAC offers a unique opportunity to see how emergency departments around the country can truly reduce their risk and thus minimize their long-term medical malpractice costs. EMPAC recognizes that ABEM and AOBEM certification is the cornerstone from which we will accomplish our mission.

The leadership in AAEM has maintained that solving the medical malpractice problem has become the linchpin for getting ownership back to the doctors. A common thread to being able to start a democratic group, whether from scratch or breaking away an intact group from one of the CMGs, has been obtaining malpractice insurance.

EMPAC RRG is licensed in multiple states and that list of states continues to grow as we find groups that fit the mission. Most of the standard carriers that insure our specialty will “get what the market will bear,” meaning they will charge us the highest prices that they can without losing you to another carrier. In this time of shrinking markets due to the current medical malpractice crisis these insurers have the leverage they need to drive up prices. Quality EM groups end up paying for the not so quality groups that are in the same risk pool. EMPAC RRG’s mission is simple and starts with best of class emergency medicine physicians which we believe are those that are ABEM or AOBEM boarded. The company also recognizes that board certification is only the start of an underwriting process which looks at multiple factors. These factors include, but are not limited to, leadership, the quality of the consultants, and the ability to adjust and learn from prior malpractice incidents. EMPAC RRG also believes that simply having a case settled or lost should not automatically make your group high risk. These losses are extensively reviewed in a creative underwriting process. EMPAC uses experienced practicing EM physicians that are directly involved in this process of reviewing the cases that are normally punitively looked at in standard market.

In the company’s numerous discussions with interested EM groups, common statements have remained indelible, and they go something like this: “they increased my rates unfairly last year” or “they handled my case improperly.” The folks at EMPAC RRG have found a solution to the “they problem,” and it starts with “we.” We are the masters of our own malpractice destiny. If you step back and look at the talent pool in emergency medicine it’s impressive. Using that talent in a concerted effort with a common goal is what EMPAC RRG is all about. As the title suggests “it’s not rocket science,” merely simplifying what the insurance industry has complicated for self-serving reasons.

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