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CHAPTER 79.

 MEDICAL MALPRACTICE ACTIONS

**SECTION 15‑79‑110.** Definitions

As used in this chapter:

(1) “Ambulatory surgical facility” means a licensed, distinct, freestanding, self‑contained entity that is organized, administered, equipped, and operated exclusively for the purpose of performing surgical procedures or related care, treatment, procedures, and/or services, by licensed health care providers, for which patients are scheduled to arrive, receive surgery or related care, treatment, procedures, and/or services, and be discharged on the same day. This term does not include abortion clinics.

(2) “Health care institution” means an ambulatory surgical facility, a hospital, an institutional general infirmary, a nursing home, and a renal dialysis facility.

(3) “Health care provider” means a physician, surgeon, osteopath, nurse, oral surgeon, dentist, pharmacist, chiropractor, optometrist, podiatrist, or any similar category of licensed health care provider, including a health care practice, association, partnership, or other legal entity.

(4) “Hospital” means a licensed facility with an organized medical staff to maintain and operate organized facilities and services to accommodate two or more nonrelated persons for the diagnosis, treatment, and care of such persons over a period exceeding twenty‑four hours and provides medical and surgical care of acute illness, injury, or infirmity and may provide obstetrical care, and in which all diagnoses, treatment, or care are administered by or performed under the direction of persons currently licensed to practice medicine and surgery in the State of South Carolina. This term includes a hospital that provides specialized service for one type of care, such as tuberculosis, maternity, or orthopedics.

(5) “Institutional general infirmary” means a licensed facility which is established within the jurisdiction of a larger nonmedical institution and which maintains and operates organized facilities and services to accommodate two or more nonrelated students, residents, or inmates with illness, injury, or infirmity for a period exceeding twenty‑four hours for the diagnosis, treatment, and care of such persons and which provides medical, surgical, and professional nursing care, and in which all diagnoses, treatment, or care are administered by or performed under the direction of persons currently licensed to practice medicine and surgery in the State of South Carolina.

(6) “Medical malpractice” means doing that which the reasonably prudent health care provider or health care institution would not do or not doing that which the reasonably prudent health care provider or health care institution would do in the same or similar circumstances.

(7) “Nursing home” means a licensed facility with an organized nursing staff to maintain and operate organized facilities and services to accommodate two or more unrelated persons over a period exceeding twenty‑four hours which is operated either in connection with a hospital or as a freestanding facility for the express or implied purpose of providing skilled nursing services for persons who are not in need of hospital care. This term does not include assisted living, independent living, or community residential care facilities that do not provide skilled nursing services.

(8) “Renal dialysis facility” means an outpatient facility which offers staff assisted dialysis or training and supported services for self‑dialysis to end‑stage renal disease patients.

(9) “Skilled nursing services” means services that:

(a) are ordered by a physician;

(b) require the skills of technical or professional personnel such as registered nurses, licensed practical (vocational) nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech pathologists or audiologists; and

(c) are furnished directly by, or under the supervision of such personnel.

**SECTION 15‑79‑120.** Mediation and arbitration.

At any time before a medical malpractice action is brought to trial, the parties shall participate in mediation governed by procedures established in the South Carolina Circuit Court Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules in effect at the time for the State or any portion of the State. Parties may also agree to participate in binding arbitration, nonbinding arbitration, early neutral evaluation, or other forms of alternative dispute resolution.

**SECTION 15‑79‑125.** Notice of Intent to File Suit as prerequisite to filing action; subpoena of medical of records; depositions; mandatory prelitigation mediation; initiating action; ADR participation.

(A) Prior to filing or initiating a civil action alleging injury or death as a result of medical malpractice, the plaintiff shall contemporaneously file a Notice of Intent to File Suit and an affidavit of an expert witness, subject to the affidavit requirements established in Section 15‑36‑100, in a county in which venue would be proper for filing or initiating the civil action. The notice must name all adverse parties as defendants, must contain a short and plain statement of the facts showing that the party filing the notice is entitled to relief, must be signed by the plaintiff or by his attorney, and must include any standard interrogatories or similar disclosures required by the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure. Filing the Notice of Intent to File Suit tolls all applicable statutes of limitations. The Notice of Intent to File Suit must be served upon all named defendants in accordance with the service rules for a summons and complaint outlined in the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure.

(B) After the Notice of Intent to File Suit is filed and served, all named parties may subpoena medical records and other documents potentially related to the medical malpractice claim pursuant to the rules governing the service and enforcement of subpoenas outlined in the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure. Upon leave of court, the named parties also may take depositions pursuant to the rules governing discovery outlined in the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure.

(C) Within ninety days and no later than one hundred twenty days from the service of the Notice of Intent to File Suit, the parties shall participate in a mediation conference unless an extension for no more than sixty days is granted by the court based upon a finding of good cause. Unless inconsistent with this section, the Circuit Court Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules in effect at the time of the mediation conference for all or any part of the State shall govern the mediation process, including compensation of the mediator and payment of the fees and expenses of the mediation conference. The parties otherwise are responsible for their own expenses related to mediation pursuant to this section.

(D) The circuit court has jurisdiction to enforce the provisions of this section.

(E) If the matter cannot be resolved through mediation, the plaintiff may initiate the civil action by filing a summons and complaint pursuant to the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure. The action must be filed:

(1) within sixty days after the mediator determines that the mediation is not viable, that an impasse exists, or that the mediation should end; or

(2) prior to expiration of the statute of limitations, whichever is later.

(F) Participation in the prelitigation mediation pursuant to this section does not alter or eliminate any obligation of the parties to participate in alternative dispute resolution after the civil action is initiated. However, there is no requirement for participation in more than one alternative dispute resolution forum following the filing of a summons and complaint to initiate a civil action in the matter.

**SECTION 15‑79‑130.** Report to licensing entity of expert testimony or evidence offered in bad faith or without reasonable basis.

If a judge finds that an expert health care provider or health care institution in a medical malpractice action in this State has offered testimony or evidence in bad faith or without a reasonable basis in fact or otherwise acted unethically in conjunction with testifying as an expert in deposition or at trial, the judge must report the expert to the state entity that licenses and regulates the profession of the expert or the type of health care entity represented by the expert.