

Koskoff lauded by law peers

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[Michael Koskoff](#), the Bridgeport attorney, knows a little something about the health care system. He's one of those malpractice attorneys that some insurers and doctors blame for raising health care costs by winning lawsuits.

Koskoff, a partner in Koskoff, Koskoff and Bieder at 350 Fairfield Ave., Bridgeport, is so good in the area of litigating medical malpractice that he was selected by Best Lawyers, a peer-review journal, as the Lawyer of Year for the region in the area of malpractice. He's won millions of dollars in malpractice judgments during a career of more than 40 years.

Koskoff's first case was against Bridgeport Hospital, the place where he was born, and a doctor there who failed to administer a test to a newborn baby. If the test had been given, the baby probably would have avoided brain damage, he said. And he found a doctor to testify to that effect.

"Suing a doctor, it just seemed wrong," Koskoff said about his first lawsuit. He said he then thought of the child and his parents and what they were facing in life.

Koskoff dismissed the argument that attorneys are to blame for the high cost of health care. He said malpractice awards account for less than 1 percent of health care costs and juries can't be fooled into awarding money to charges without merit.

Koskoff said the real problems in the system are errors and insurance companies. Medical errors are the third-leading cause of death in the United States, he said. Preventable infections also account for more costs than lawsuits. Reduce both of those and costs will decrease, Koskoff said.

Koskoff said he believes all people must take responsibility for their actions. He said the firm reviews 1,500 malpractice cases a year but only takes 25 or 35.

Peter Gioia, vice president and economist with the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, said that malpractice suits are a legitimate part of the problem with the health care system.

"The trial bar wouldn't be chasing ambulances if it was not lucrative," Gioia said, noting that many doctors run extra tests that wouldn't be needed in case because they may get sued. He said that drives up costs beyond the settlements and jury awards. Gioia also said insurers are big employers who not only pay claims but also invest in other areas of the economy, so getting rid of them would be damaging in many ways.

But Koskoff, in his years in courtrooms and talking to those who have been injured sees it differently.

"I'm one of those single-payer kind of guys," he said.

He said it doesn't make sense "to try to put a level of profit on a system that is already strained. Why you're paying stockholders is beyond me. It didn't used to be that way. The doctor would bill the patient and the patient would pay the doctor."

Despite his malpractice acumen, Koskoff's news clippings read more like a TV drama. He's worked on cases to desegregate fire and police departments in the region, as well as winning settlements for women who were subjected to drugs that have led to cancer.

Having a dramatic career shouldn't be a surprise, Koskoff originally was set on becoming an actor. But he was lucky, he said, he had the option to try out an acting career while a legal career remained open to him.

"My father was already a prominent trial lawyer so I went off and studied at the Shakespeare School," he said. "I felt that's what I really wanted to do until I started to do it."