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How important is the risk of medical malpractice litigations against cardiologists in Belgium?

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Abstract

Background: Medical malpractice litigations represent an increasing reality for clinical physicians. No malpractice claims data are available on cardiologists in Belgium.

Aim: We calculated the number of malpractice claims against cardiologists in Belgium based on the annual reports of the Fund for Medical Accidents (FMA).

Methods: FMA annual reports are available online in the public domain from 2012 onwards, and they were reviewed focussing on Cardiology.

Results: A total of 6884 applications for malpractice litigations were filed through the FMA, resulting in a final decision for 3185 health providers between 2014 and 2023. In this 10 year period, claims were filed against 73 cardiologists, ranking them in the top 15 specialities at risk for malpractice litigations. There are currently 1237 practicing cardiologists in Belgium, indicating that the cumulative 10 year risk of malpractice litigation through the FMA alone is 6%. This is lower than expected based on data in the literature, showing that missed diagnosis (myocardial infarction) and complications of interventional cardiology procedures represent the most common types of malpractice litigations against cardiologists. Compared to Gastroenterology, another interventional speciality within the field of Internal Medicine, Belgian cardiologists seem less prone to malpractice litigations. A total of 92 claims were filed through the FMA on a total of 777 practicing gastroenterologists (12%; $p < 0.001$ Chi-square).

Conclusions: Based on the FMA annual reports, Belgian cardiologists face only a moderate risk of malpractice litigations reaching 6% over a 10 year time period, as compared to 12% cumulative risk of gastroenterologists.

Keywords: Belgium; Medical malpractice litigation; cardiology.

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