

CHAPTER 197

TORT REFORM — MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

H.F. 693

AN ACT relating to civil actions and statutes of limitations in civil actions, the rate of interest on judgments and decrees, procedures for furnishing patient records of plaintiffs, comparative fault in consortium claims, damages in civil actions, joint and several liability, and providing effective dates.

Be It Enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa:

Section 1. Section 135.11, Code 1997, is amended by adding the following new subsection:

NEW SUBSECTION. 18A. Consult with the office of statewide clinical education programs at the university of iowa college of medicine and annually submit a report to the general assembly by January 15 verifying the number of physicians in active practice in iowa by county who are engaged in providing obstetrical care. To the extent data are readily available, the report shall include information concerning the number of deliveries per year by specialty and county, the age of physicians performing deliveries, and the number of current year graduates of the university of iowa college of medicine and the university of osteopathic medicine and health sciences entering into residency programs in obstetrics, gynecology, and family practice. The report may include additional data relating to access to obstetrical services that may be available.

Sec. 2. Section 535.3, subsection 1, Code 1997, is amended by striking the subsection and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

1. Interest shall be allowed on all money due on judgments and decrees of courts at a rate calculated according to section 668.13, except for interest due pursuant to section 85.30 for which the rate shall be ten percent per year.

Sec. 3. Section 535.3, subsection 2, Code 1997, is amended by striking the subsection.

Sec. 4. Section 535.3, subsection 3, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

3. Interest on periodic payments for child, spousal, or medical support shall not accrue until thirty days after the payment becomes due and owing and shall accrue at a rate of ten percent per annum thereafter.

Sec. 5. Section 614.1, Code 1997, is amended by adding the following new subsection:

NEW SUBSECTION. 2A. WITH RESPECT TO PRODUCTS.

a. Those founded on the death of a person or injuries to the person or property brought against the manufacturer, assembler, designer, supplier of specifications, seller, lessor, or distributor of a product based upon an alleged defect in the design, inspection, testing, manufacturing, formulation, marketing, packaging, warning, labeling of the product, or any other alleged defect or failure of whatever nature or kind, based on the theories of strict liability in tort, negligence, or breach of an implied warranty shall not be commenced more than fifteen years after the product was first purchased, leased, bailed, or installed for use or consumption unless expressly warranted for a longer period of time by the manufacturer, assembler, designer, supplier of specifications, seller, lessor, or distributor of the product. This subsection shall not affect the time during which a person found liable may seek and obtain contribution or indemnity from another person whose actual fault caused a product to be defective. This subsection shall not apply if the manufacturer, assembler, designer, supplier of specifications, seller, lessor, or distributor of the product intentionally misrepresents facts about the product or fraudulently conceals information about the product and that conduct was a substantial cause of the claimant's harm.

b. (1) The fifteen-year limitation in paragraph "a" shall not apply to the time period in which to discover a disease that is latent and caused by exposure to a harmful material, in

which event the action shall be deemed to have accrued when the disease and such disease's cause have been made known to the person or at the point the person should have been aware of the disease and such disease's cause. This subsection shall not apply to cases governed by section 614.1, subsection 11.

(2) As used in this paragraph, "harmful material" means silicon gel breast implants, which were implanted prior to July 12, 1992; and chemical substances commonly known as asbestos, dioxins, tobacco, or polychlorinated biphenyls, whether alone or as part of any product; or any substance which is determined to present an unreasonable risk of injury to health or the environment by the United States environmental protection agency pursuant to the federal Toxic Substance Control Act, 15 U.S.C. § 2601 et seq., or by this state, if that risk is regulated by the United States environmental protection agency or this state.

Sec. 6. Section 614.1, subsection 9, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

9. MALPRACTICE.

a. Those Except as provided in paragraph "b", those founded on injuries to the person or wrongful death against any physician and surgeon, osteopath, osteopathic physician and surgeon, dentist, podiatric physician, optometrist, pharmacist, chiropractor, physician assistant, or nurse, licensed under chapter 147, or a hospital licensed under chapter 135B, arising out of patient care, within two years after the date on which the claimant knew, or through the use of reasonable diligence should have known, or received notice in writing of the existence of, the injury or death for which damages are sought in the action, whichever of the dates occurs first, but in no event shall any action be brought more than six years after the date on which occurred the act or omission or occurrence alleged in the action to have been the cause of the injury or death unless a foreign object unintentionally left in the body caused the injury or death.

b. An action subject to paragraph "a" and brought on behalf of a minor who was under the age of eight years when the act, omission, or occurrence alleged in the action occurred, shall be commenced no later than the minor's tenth birthday or as provided in paragraph "a", whichever is later.

Sec. 7. Section 614.8, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

614.8 MINORS AND PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS.

a. The times limited for actions herein in this chapter, except those brought for penalties and forfeitures, shall be are extended in favor of minors and persons with mental illness, so that they shall have one year from and after the termination of such the disability within which to commence said an action.

b. Except as provided in section 614.1, subsection 9, the times limited for actions in this chapter, except those brought for penalties and forfeitures, are extended in favor of minors, so that they shall have one year from and after attainment of majority within which to commence an action.

Sec. 8. Section 622.10, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

622.10 COMMUNICATIONS IN PROFESSIONAL CONFIDENCE — EXCEPTIONS —
REQUIRED CONSENT TO RELEASE OF MEDICAL RECORDS AFTER COMMENCEMENT OF LEGAL ACTION — APPLICATION TO COURT.

1. A practicing attorney, counselor, physician, surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, mental health professional, or the stenographer or confidential clerk of any such person, who obtains information by reason of the person's employment, or a member of the clergy shall not be allowed, in giving testimony, to disclose any confidential communication properly entrusted to the person in the person's professional capacity, and necessary and proper to enable the person to discharge the functions of the person's office according to the usual course of practice or discipline.

2. The prohibition does not apply to cases where the person in whose favor the prohibition is made waives the rights conferred; nor does the prohibition apply to physicians or

surgeons, physician assistants, advanced registered nurse practitioners, mental health professionals, or to the stenographer or confidential clerk of any physicians or surgeons, physician assistants, advanced registered nurse practitioners, or mental health professionals, in a civil action in which the condition of the person in whose favor the prohibition is made is an element or factor of the claim or defense of the person or of any party claiming through or under the person. The evidence is admissible upon trial of the action only as it relates to the condition alleged.

3. a. In a civil action in which the condition of the plaintiff in whose favor the prohibition is made is an element or factor of the claim or defense of the adverse party or of any party claiming through or under the adverse party, the adverse party shall make a written request for records relating to the condition alleged upon the plaintiff's counsel for a legally sufficient patient's waiver under federal and state law. Upon receipt of a written request, the plaintiff shall execute the patient's waiver and release it to the adverse party making the request within sixty days of receipt of the written request. The patient's waiver may require a physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional to do all of the following:

(1) Provide a complete copy of the patient's records including, but not limited to, any reports or diagnostic imaging relating to the condition alleged.

(2) Consult with the attorney for the adverse party prior to providing testimony regarding the plaintiff's medical history and the condition alleged and opinions regarding health etiology and prognosis for the condition alleged subject to the limitations in paragraph "c".

b. If a plaintiff fails to sign a waiver within the prescribed time period, the court may order disclosure or compliance. The failure of a party to comply with the court's order may be grounds for dismissal of the action or any other relief authorized under the rules of civil procedure.

c. Any physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional who provides records, provides information during consultation, or otherwise responds in good faith to a request pursuant to paragraph "a" shall be immune with respect to all civil or criminal penalties, claims, or actions of any kind with respect to this section.

d. Any physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional who provides records or consults with the counsel for the adverse party shall be entitled to charge a reasonable fee for production of the records, diagnostic imaging, and consultation. Any party seeking consultation shall be responsible for payment of all charges. The fee for copies of any records shall be based upon actual cost of production.

e. Defendant's counsel shall provide a written notice to plaintiff's counsel in a manner consistent with the Iowa rules of civil procedure providing for notice of deposition at least ten days prior to any meeting with plaintiff's physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional. Plaintiff's counsel has the right to be present at all such meetings, or participate in telephonic communication with the physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional and counsel for the defendant. Plaintiff's counsel may seek a protective order structuring all communication by making application to the court at any time.

f. The provisions of this subsection do not apply to actions or claims brought pursuant to chapter 85, 85A, or 85B.

4. If an adverse party desires the oral deposition, either discovery or evidentiary, of a physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional to which the prohibition would otherwise apply or the stenographer or confidential clerk of a physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional or desires to call a physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional

to which the prohibition would otherwise apply or the stenographer or confidential clerk of a physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional as a witness at the trial of the action, the adverse party shall file an application with the court for permission to do so. The court upon hearing, which shall not be ex parte, shall grant permission unless the court finds that the evidence sought does not relate to the condition alleged and shall fix a reasonable fee to be paid to the physician or surgeon, physician assistant, advanced registered nurse practitioner, or mental health professional by the party taking the deposition or calling the witness.

5. For the purposes of this section, "mental health professional" means a psychologist licensed under chapter 154B, a registered nurse licensed under chapter 152, a social worker licensed under chapter 154C, a marital and family therapist licensed under chapter 154D, a mental health counselor licensed under chapter 154D, or an individual holding at least a master's degree in a related field as deemed appropriate by the board of behavioral science examiners.

6. ~~No~~ A qualified school guidance counselor, who has met the certification and accreditation standards of the department of education as provided in section 256.11, subsection 10, who obtains information by reason of the counselor's employment as a qualified school guidance counselor shall not be allowed, in giving testimony, to disclose any confidential communications properly entrusted to the counselor by a pupil or the pupil's parent or guardian in the counselor's capacity as a qualified school guidance counselor and necessary and proper to enable the counselor to perform the counselor's duties as a qualified school guidance counselor.

Sec. 9. Section 624.18, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

624.18 DISTINCTION BETWEEN DEBT AND DESIGNATION AND CALCULATION OF DAMAGES.

1. In all actions where the plaintiff recovers a sum of money, the amount to which the plaintiff is entitled may be awarded the plaintiff by the judgment generally, without any distinction being therein made as to whether such sum is recovered by way of debt or damages.

1A. In all personal injury actions where the plaintiff recovers a sum of money that, according to special verdict, is intended, in whole or in part, to address the future damages of the plaintiff, that portion of the judgment that reflects the future damages shall be adjusted by the court or the finder of fact to reflect the present value of the sum.

2. Under no circumstances shall there be a reduction to present value more than one time by either the trier of fact or the court.

Sec. 10. Section 668.3, subsection 1, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

1. a. Contributory fault shall not bar recovery in an action by a claimant to recover damages for fault resulting in death or in injury to person or property unless the claimant bears a greater percentage of fault than the combined percentage of fault attributed to the defendants, third-party defendants and persons who have been released pursuant to section 668.7, but any damages allowed shall be diminished in proportion to the amount of fault attributable to the claimant.

b. Contributory fault shall not bar recovery in an action by a claimant to recover damages for loss of services, companionship, society, or consortium, unless the fault attributable to the person whose injury or death provided the basis for the damages is greater in percentage than the combined percentage of fault attributable to the defendants, third-party defendants, and persons who have been released pursuant to section 668.7, but any damages allowed shall be diminished in proportion to the amount of fault attributable to the person whose injury or death provided the basis for the damages.

Sec. 11. Section 668.3, subsection 2, paragraph b, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

b. The percentage of the total fault allocated to each claimant, defendant, third-party defendant, and person who has been released from liability under section 668.7, and injured or deceased person whose injury or death provides a basis for a claim to recover damages for loss of consortium, services, companionship, or society. For this purpose the court may determine that two or more persons are to be treated as a single party.

Sec. 12. Section 668.3, subsection 8, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

8. In an action brought pursuant to this chapter the court shall instruct the jury to answer special interrogatories or, if there is no jury, shall make findings on each specific item of requested or awarded damages indicating that portion of the judgment or decree awarded for past damages and that portion of the judgment or decree awarded for future damages. All awards of future damages shall be calculated according to the method set forth in section 624.18.

Sec. 13. Section 668.4, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

668.4 JOINT AND SEVERAL LIABILITY.

In actions brought under this chapter, the rule of joint and severable* liability shall not apply to defendants who are found to bear less than fifty percent of the total fault assigned to all parties. However, a defendant found to bear fifty percent or more of fault shall only be jointly and severally liable for economic damages and not for any noneconomic damage awards.

Sec. 14. Section 668.13, subsection 3, Code 1997, is amended to read as follows:

3. Interest shall be calculated as of the date of judgment at a rate equal to the coupon issue yield equivalent, as determined by the United States secretary of the treasury, of the average accepted auction price for the last auction of fifty-two week United States treasury bills settled immediately prior to the date of the judgment plus two percent. The state court administrator shall distribute notice monthly of that rate and any changes to that rate to all district courts.

Sec. 15. If any provision of this Act or the application thereof to any person is invalid, the invalidity shall not affect the provisions or applications of this Act which can be given effect without the invalid provisions or application, and to this end the provisions of this Act are severable.

Sec. 16. **EFFECTIVE DATES.** Sections 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 of this Act shall apply to actions filed after July 1, 1997. Section 5 of this Act shall apply to actions filed after July 1, 1997, except that any cause of action having actually accrued as of the date of enactment of this Act shall be preserved according to the law applicable to the statute of limitations in effect at the time of accrual. Sections 6 and 7 of this Act shall apply to all causes of action accruing on or after July 1, 1997, and to all causes of action accruing before July 1, 1997, and filed after July 1, 1999.

Approved May 29, 1997

* The word "several", as it appeared in the 1997 Code and in the bill as introduced, probably intended