

When a Long-Term Team Member Leaves Your Practice

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Many offices that we work with have team members that have been with the practice for many years. It is a great testament to the practice owner to keep such long-term employees; not to mention that the patients love this as well. The hard part is that at some point these employees move on and the practice is left wondering how their patients are going to react to this departure.

First things first, it is probably not going to affect your bottom line as much as you think it will. Yes! Your patients love this team member and that is great. All too often we see practice owners that think the patients are all going to leave because the long-term team member left and very rarely does this happen. I personally worked in a practice for over 23 years and I do not believe any patients left because I left. As much as we, the employee, would like to think this is going to happen...more than likely it is not. Patients are loyal to the doctor as well as any team member, however, they are also creatures of habit. Most people do not like to change something they are comfortable with so they will more likely keep going to the same office.

Keeping your patients happy and in your practice is the primary concern when an employee leaves the practice. It is all in how you handle the departure. We recommend talking to the employee that is leaving in an exit interview and discussing how the conversation with patients is going to be handled. If the employee is moving on to a new practice, let them know that it is unethical to solicit patients to the other practice as well as how you will handle the conversation about the departure. Speak in a positive manner to your patients about your employees or fellow team members. You may simply say "Sally wanted to work closer to home" or "Sally needed different hours to accommodate her needs". Refrain from anything derogatory or even eluding to anything that could be construed as negative. When I left the practice I was working in, it was because I was opening my own consulting company. If the employee is exploring other avenues, ask them if it is okay to share this information with your patients. The same is said if someone is retiring, just ask them if they are okay with you letting your patients know they have retired. You always want to ask permission.

There are also times that employees are going to leave under unpleasant terms. This happens with our embezzlement clients when they are letting the person that is



suspected of embezzling go. You have to walk a very fine line here. Do not tell your patients that an employee has done anything wrong until that has been proven in court. You do not want to open yourself up to potential problems in the future. You will also want to maintain HIPAA rules if an employee leaves for medical purposes.

It is important to always keep your conversations professional and respectful. Even if the employment ended on a sour note, your patients do not need to know all the details and really don't want to either. My husband and I were going to a church at one point that we thoroughly enjoyed. After a couple of years there, we began finding out some of the behind the scenes things that were happening. While these behaviors were not criminal or even particularly bad, it still gave us a sour taste about the employees in that church. Do not give your patients a reason to have a sour taste in their mouth about your practice. For them, everything should always be positive and professional.