

Ask the Broker

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What is the best way to inform patients of my practice sale?

That really depends

on the practice and your relationship with your patients. A practice that is driven mostly by PPO and HMO plans is different than a practice that is mainly fee-for-service or personality driven. A practice that has had different associates in and out of the practice over the years is also different than a practice that has had only one provider, irregardless of whether it is PPO-driven or not.

In almost all circumstances, we advise that a letter be mailed out on the same day as the close of sale. We also advise the staff or the retiring doctor to call patients who are scheduled the first few days, who may not have received the letter prior to their appointment. While the announcement may seem unusually late, there are some cases when a retirement/sale letter was sent to the entire patient base and the transition did not take place. You can imagine the turmoil that would cause in a practice!

The letter is generally a combined effort of the selling doctor and the new doctor, written as a "goodbye" from the departing doctor and a letter of introduction of the new doctor. Ultimately the final draft is in the complete control of the new doctor since it is their opportunity to convince the patients to return to the practice for their dental care. I would estimate that 95% of our practice transitions include a very brief two week transition with the retiring dentist. (Review June 2011 "Ask the Broker" feature about this issue.) Therefore, in a personality-driven one-doctor transition, this letter is very important. Some doctors have even hosted an "open house" to introduce the patients to the succeeding doctor and say goodbye to their patients. This is rare and I believe not necessary, but again, it all depends on the relationships in the practice.

Some buyers decide that a letter to the patients is unnecessary. If the practice is PPO, HMO driven, or has had many associates in recent years, the patients are either not personally connected to the retiring doctor, or not surprised if a different doctor will be completing their treatment. The buyers correctly surmise that a letter introducing the change maybe more detrimental than beneficial. Instead, they will have some brochure or letter at the front desk which informs the patients of their "unparalleled" qualifications to continue their dental care.

The bottom line is that most patients, (up to 95% estimated by some management companies) will return to the practice if their x-rays are there, the hygienist or front office personnel are there, or simply because that is where they go for their dental care. Unless the patient is in pain, dental care is not high on their list of concerns.

Questions? E-mail wps@succeed.net

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