

PHYSICIAN'S LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Background

The Code of Conduct requires that physicians:

"Having accepted professional responsibility for a patient, continue to provide services until they are no longer required or wanted; until another suitable physician has assumed responsibility for the patient; or until the patient has been given adequate notice that you intend to terminate the relationship."

Particular problems may arise when a physician intends to take an extended leave of absence from practice, such as parental leave. The physician may not wish to terminate the relationship with patients, but may be unable to make a suitable arrangement coverage with colleagues for coverage during the leave. Discontinuing services to existing patients without arranging alternative service or providing reasonable notice is unacceptable.

Scope:

This Guideline applies to circumstances where a physician is taking an extended leave of absence from practice.

Recommendations:

1. Notice to Patients

- The physician who intends to take a leave of absence from practice must provide reasonable notice to patients.
- The notice to patients should include:
 - when the leave of absence begins
 - the anticipated return date
 - particulars of any arrangements for care that have been made for the patient during the physician's leave of absence.

2. Alternate Arrangements for Care

- The physician who intends to take a leave of absence from practice must attempt to make some arrangements for alternate care of patients, particularly those who are in the course of treatment at the time the leave of absence begins.
- The physician must document efforts to make a suitable alternate arrangement for the care of patients. Even when the physician is unable to make suitable alternate arrangements for the care of his/her patients, the physician must be able to demonstrate reasonable efforts to make suitable alternate arrangements.

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3. Patient Access to Medical Information

- The physician who is unable to make suitable alternate arrangements for the care of patients during his/her leave of absence must make arrangements to ensure that during the physician's absence patients or their caregivers have appropriate access to information contained in the patient's medical record.

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A guideline is practice generally recommended.