

Colorado State Board of Medical Examiners Policy

POLICY NUMBER: 40-08
Title: Guidelines for Closure of, or Departure from, a Medical Practice
Date Issued: 08/10/00
Date(s) Revised:
Reference:
Purpose: To provide guidance to physicians regarding the departure from or closure of a medical practice office.

POLICY: It is the position of the Colorado Board of Medical Examiners that due care should be taken when departing from or closing a medical practice, to ensure a smooth transition from the current physician to the new treating physician. This should occur with a minimum of disruption in the continuity and quality of medical care being provided to the patient.

During such times, practitioners and other parties that may be involved in such processes must consider how their actions affect patients. In particular practitioners have the following obligations:

Permit Patient Choice

It is the patient's decision from whom to receive care. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all practitioners and other parties that may be involved to ensure that:

- A. Patients are notified of changes in the practice. This is often best done by letter to patients who are currently, or have recently been under the physician's care, and should explain the changes in the practice, and the final date of practice;
- B. Patients are advised as to where their medical records will be stored, and how they may access those records;
- C. Patients are advised as to how to reach any practitioner(s) remaining in the practice; and
- D. Patients clearly understand that the choice of health care provider is the patients'.

Practitioners continue to have obligations toward patients during and after departure from, or the closing of a medical practice. Except in cases of death or other incapacity of the practitioner, practitioners may not abandon a patient or abruptly withdraw from the care of a patient. Therefore, patients should be given reasonable advance notice to allow their securing other care.

Good continuity of care includes preserving, keeping confidential, and providing appropriate access to medical records. Allow considerable time for patients to request that their records be copied and forwarded to the new treating physician. (Please reference the Medical Board's guidelines regarding retention and destruction of medical records.) Also, good continuity of care may often include making appropriate referrals. The practitioner(s) and other parties that may be involved should ensure the requirements for continuity of care are effectively addressed.

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Notifying Other Parties

In addition to notifying patients, there are other parties who will need to know of the change in your practice. Contact:

- the Medical Board office to update your address of record;
- your malpractice insurance carrier to advise them of the change in your practice status; and
- any managed care organizations which have not already been advised
- physician membership organizations (e.g. AMA, AOA, specialty societies) may also want to know of the discontinuance of your practice. They may have helpful information or guides to assist you in closing your practice

No practitioner, group of practitioners, or other parties that may be involved should interfere with the fulfillment of these obligations, nor should practitioners put themselves in a position where they cannot be assured these obligations will be met.