

Termination of the Physician – Patient Relationship

On occasion, a treating physician will determine that the relationship he or she or the practice has with a patient is not contributing to the delivery of quality care to that patient. The physician may decide that it is appropriate to terminate their relationship. The following guidelines will ensure that staff involved in this process act according to the requirements of the law and maintain the professionalism of this practice.

- The termination of a physician-patient relationship will under no circumstances be based on the patient's race, gender, religion, disability, national origin, age, or any other discrimination.
- Upon direction of the treating physician, the office manager or a designee will prepare a letter of termination for the physician's signature.
 - The letter will notify the patient of how long he or she has to find another treating physician. The length of time will be determined by the physician in this facility but will not be for a period less of than 30 days.
 - The letter will stress the importance of establishing a therapeutic relationship with another physician as soon as possible. The letter will suggest the patient contact the county medical society, local hospital, or medical school for an appropriate referral, and/or contact his or her managed care plan, payor, etc., to determine what other physician(s) of similar credentials are on the patient's plan (if the patient is subject to a managed care plan).
 - The letter will be sent to the patient via "certified mail, return receipt requested," and regular U.S. mail. It will include a medical records release form with a request that the patient notify this office as soon as possible where he or she would like a copy of the medical records sent.
 - A copy of the letter, the certified mail form, and any receipt received from the U.S. Postal Service will be placed in the patient's medical record.
 - The patient will continue to be treated as any other patient until the expiration of the time indicated in the letter.
 - Regardless of whether the allotted time has expired, treatment always will be rendered when there is any question of an acute or emergent condition. Should that situation arise, the physician will evaluate the patient, render appropriate care, and/or have the patient transferred to the local emergency room. The office manager will send a follow-up letter (certified mail and U.S. mail) reminding the patient that he or she will need to find another physician.
- After the time indicated in the letter expires, should the patient call for an appointment for non-acute care (e.g., annual visit, prescription refill, or the like), the front office staff will remind the patient that he or she no is longer being treated at this facility and decline an

appointment. Should there be any complaint, office staff will leave a message for the treating physician to contact the patient directly at the physician's earliest convenience (or, as an alternative, the office manager).

- Should the patient arrive at the office demanding to see the physician and the patient **is not in an emergent condition**, the front office staff again will remind the patient that he or she is no longer being treated at this facility and decline an appointment. If the patient becomes combative, staff will call security, law enforcement, and/or activate the office's Workplace Violence Prevention policy and procedure as appropriate.
- All questions and conversations about the reason for termination will remain the responsibility of the treating physician.
- All medical records will be appropriately transferred upon receipt of a proper release of medical records form.
- At all times, all employees will maintain their professionalism and be polite to any patient who contacts this facility, regardless of whether care of that patient continues.
- See the North Carolina Medical Board's position statement on "Termination of the Physician-Patient Relationship" at the internet address below:
<http://www.ncmedboard.org/Clients/NCBOM/Public/NewsandForum/phyapat.htm>