

COMMENTARY

Changing Jobs: Four Lessons Learned

Denise Millstine, MD

Dr. Millstine is a member of the Forum editorial board and can be reached at Millstine.Denise@mayo.edu.

We can barely open a journal or newsletter without being reminded that these are changing times in health care. Never in the history of providing healing to patients have physicians found a more shifting landscape. With uncertainty comes dissatisfaction and with dissatisfaction, change.

Estimates for the number of physicians planning to change jobs in the next year vary. Jackson Healthcare, a large physician staffing service, surveyed thousands of doctors in 2013 and found nearly a quarter were planning to change jobs in the next year.¹ Job changes may be occurring more frequently, but they are hardly a new phenomenon. Still, very little is published regarding these transitions in the workforce.

In the last six months, I chose to leave a community academic medical center for another academic position. My reasons were varied. The new position offered a scope of practice more aligned with my clinical interests and training. I deemed the potential for professional development to be greater with new mentors and collaborators. My commute time would be reduced dramatically, and I would be able to spend more time with my young family. Still, the decision for the change was a difficult one. My old position had offered many opportunities, and I was part of an established and familiar team. I opted to take the leap. In the process, I learned the following lessons.

Where Nobody Knows Your Name: Re-establishing Your Reputation

In a new position, your reputation is not established. This affects minor and major details alike. Whether you wear a suit or khakis is suddenly interpreted as part of your professionalism. Whether you practice medicine by applying the US Preventive Ser-

vices Task Force, American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology, American College of Radiology, or American Cancer Society guidelines matters as well, particularly if your guideline organization of choice differs from that of your new colleagues.

In turn, your thoughtful communication cannot be overemphasized. E-mails should be carefully worded and conversations given your full attention. Repeat your name so others learn it, and try to memorize theirs as well. Remember, initially at least, that every impression is a first impression.

You're Not in Kansas Anymore: Learning the New Culture

Every hospital, every clinic, and every department is a little bit different. What worked in your old position might be a glaring diversion from the norm in the new one. You might have stuck your head into your old chair's office for impromptu meetings, for example, while your new boss prefers scheduled appointments.

Observe the culture as much as possible upon arrival. Try to understand it and embrace it. Unless you are certain that a suggestion to "do things the way they were done in my old office" is a world-class idea, keep it to yourself. There will be time to gently affect the culture with tenure in your position, but the initial few months are not the ideal time to "buck the system."

Second Chances: Don't Repeat Your Mistakes

Once we practice for several years, we develop a pattern. Many times, the pattern is imperfect. We stick with it because of its comfort and familiarity, but a new position is the optimal time for recognizing past mistakes and intentionally not repeating them.

One of my partners called her patients personally with results after

each visit. She built a patient panel with this expectation. While it was small, she was able to keep up with the workload. Once she had more patients and additional responsibilities, it became harder to make these phone calls herself. A new job is an ideal time to alter those components of your style that you would have done differently with hindsight. Change these habits with your move. Even if old patients follow you to the new practice, they will be understanding that things are different.

If You Didn't Write it, You Didn't Do It: The Power of Transparency

The importance of documentation in the medical record is never in doubt, but the concept of documenting non-clinical activities is often overlooked. Departmental and clinical system projects can be huge investments of time and energy, but these efforts are prone to disappear. Your team members might recognize the effort and effect of these projects, but the length of that memory and appreciation is certainly finite.

In a transition, remember to record professionally meaningful projects and activities. The most robust track record is publication or presentation, which should be encouraged and prioritized. When changing jobs, avoid letting these activities slip into the void.

Changing jobs is both challenging and exhilarating. As a fresh start, the possibilities are endless. The potential for growth is limitless. Overall, try to take a fresh look at the past and an open look at the present.

Reference

1. http://www.jacksonhealthcare.com/media/191888/2013physiciantrends-void_ebk0513.pdf accessed 7/28/13).