



WHITE PAPER

Working Through Physician Partnership Issues

When deciding to enter into a physician partnership, it is beneficial to take actions to ensure you are going into business with a reputable and reliable individual. Starting a physician partnership is an exciting time, full of new challenges, shared vision and celebrations of small successes. During the good times, keeping a relationship on solid ground while running a practice is easy. But what do you do when you do not agree, and the honeymoon period is over? Whether you are discontent with the level of effort of one partner over another or you suspect your physician partner of outright dishonesty, disputes are going to arise.

Unfortunately, there are physicians in a long standing medical practice partnership who are not satisfied with the status of the relationship. They may feel stuck, frustrated, angry...or all of these. They know they've been silent far too long, but just don't know what to do. Like many married couples, physician partners often disagree about money and how it should be allocated. Even the best of physician partnerships go through rough times. But what if your partnership has issues you think cannot be resolved? What can cause such a change in a relationship that started out with high hopes and good feelings? In this article we address some of the most common problems medical practice partnerships face and ideas for how to deal with them.

Unfair workload

Perhaps one partner feels like she is carrying the bulk of the workload. This may have happened because there wasn't an agreement about who would do what. Job roles, responsibilities and accountability have not been discussed.

Unmet expectations

Expectations may be quite different for each partner. When expectations aren't met, it's a set up for negative feelings. It's important that each partner knows what to expect from the others.

Losing interest

It is possible that a partner has lost interest in the practice or changed thinking. Over time new attractions and options will continue to present themselves to all physician partners. When a physician partner becomes disenchanted with how the partnership is going, he is more likely to lose interest over time.

No communication

Communication is so critical to maintaining a viable medical practice partnership. When physician partners get so busy doing their own thing that they can't find time to sit down with the other(s), they will likely start to feel less engaged. An unresolved issue can also lead to partners being unable to talk about certain things.

Mismatch

Unfortunately it may just be a wrong partnership. Sometimes the physician partnership has been a bad match from the beginning, but it was maintained for a variety of reasons. When the primary reason for the partnership was based on personal needs more than on business needs, if those needs are not fulfilled, the medical practice partnership will flounder. Maybe one physician thinks and acts fast and the other wants to research things in great detail. These physicians may never be able to function well together. Basic behaviors and traits will not likely change even if the person tries. Even if you think it may be a wrong partnership for your practice, it's worth making the effort to see if it's salvageable.

Being proactive and clear

If you want things to change, it's up to you to change them. Make the decision you are going to break the status quo, but you're going to do it strategically. It is extremely important that you are clear about what you want. Start by thinking about what you want for yourself and the practice. For a physician partnership to be successful, all of the physician owners must agree on the same strategic direction for the practice. If one partner wants to build a well-known physician practice and the other partner only cares about earning a decent living, the practice is destined to fail. Set a clear, agreed-upon course for the practice that meets the needs of all physician owners.

Schedule partner meetings

I cannot stress enough the importance of scheduling partner meetings regularly. When issues have arisen, you may also need to schedule a separate meeting to address them head on. Give your partner plenty of lead time and full disclosure about what the meeting is about. Let them get prepared for the meeting, but don't let it be put off because someone "doesn't have time".

Discuss actions and draft a plan

At your meeting, be prepared with actions you are willing to take. You can request or suggest actions from your partners, but leave the topic open for discussion and agreement. Once you reach agreement, set goals for yourselves and the practice. To keep things moving in the right direction it's a good idea to schedule periodic meetings to iron out details. This is the perfect time to start the habit of regular planned communications.

Set a timeframe for evaluation

Three months is a reasonable timeframe to see if the plan is achieving the results you want. Schedule an actual time where you will sit down together to see what has been accomplished toward the goals you set. If you see progress, you may want to give it another three months. If

your evaluation tells you there is no hope, it may be time to make that very difficult decision to end the relationship. If you cannot come to agreement or you are clearly going in different directions, it's probably time to part ways. Why waste any more time on a losing proposition? Yes, it's like breaking up a marriage, but sometimes it has to be. Rather than feeling defeated, congratulate yourself on gaining the freedom to move on to something better.

Finding a physician partner may seem hard, but finding your rhythm with your partner is much harder. Just like any other relationship, a business relationship too has its fair share of ups and downs. No matter how strong your relationship is with your physician partner, disputes are bound to arise sooner or later. When physician partners are disputing, their quarrels tend to disrupt the daily operations of their practice. If they are not careful about keeping their disputes between themselves, it can result in the failure of their medical practice. Remember, a strong physician partnership is built on open communication. Meet on a regular basis so you can share grievances, review roles, provide constructive criticism, and discuss future plans for the growth or direction of your practice.

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