Leave of Absence, Retirement, and Reentry into the Workforce

Holly J. Mulvey, MA1, William L. Cull, PhD2, Ethan A. B. Jewett, MA1, Gretchen L. Caspary2, PhD, and Avrum L. Katcher, MD3

1GME & Pediatric Workforce, American Academy of Pediatrics, Elk Grove Village, IL
2Health Services Research, American Academy of Pediatrics, Elk Grove Village, IL
3Senior Members Section, American Academy of Pediatrics, Elk Grove Village, IL

ABSTRACT

Physician reentry into practice can be defined as returning to professional activity/practice for which one has been trained, certified or licensed after an extended time period. This is an issue that cuts across genders and specialties. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that reentry into the workforce will affect women more than men.

There are many reasons why physicians leave clinical practice and then seek to reenter the workforce. Many of these are discussed in the JAMA article, authored by Drs. Mark and Gupta (“Re-entry into Clinical Practice: Challenges and Strategies”) in 2002. Not surprisingly, caretaking need, for both children and older parents, tops the list. The list also includes personal illness, the changing demands of academic institutions pertaining to faculty practice plans, career dissatisfaction; and alternative careers, such as the desire of a physician who has been working in an administrative role to return to the private practice setting or to reduce their clinical workload (mostly personal factors, such as health and family responsibilities). In short, problems that are beyond the individual pediatrician’s control to remedy should be of greatest concern to both employers and workforce planners, as they signify a key threat to retaining physicians in practice.

Many pediatricians who leave the workforce for an extended period of time seek to reenter clinical practice for a variety of reasons. Financial need, however, figures among the lowest priorities for these physicians. Physicians over 50 who left clinical practice for extended time periods were asked to identify factors that contributed to their decision to retire or to reduce clinical practice workload. The survey findings only articulate the perspectives of pediatricians over 50, and may not reflect the reentry trends of younger generations of physicians. This would include pediatricians who temporarily leave the workforce to rear children.

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CONCLUSIONS

The survey population (1950 pediatricians) consisted of all members of the AAP Senior Members Section and an additional random sample of pediatricians over 50 from the AAP membership database. The survey was fielded between February and May of 2006. The survey was long and consisted of 42 questions asking pediatricians over 50 about their current and future retirement plans. The survey was mailed up to 3 times, and respondents were offered no compensation for filling out the survey. A total of 1158 pediatricians over 50 years old (72%) responded to the survey.

Only 10.6% of respondents stated that they had taken a sabbatical/extreme leave of absence 6 months or more. Women accounted for 53.1% of respondents who had taken a leave of absence of 6 months or more.

1 The average time away from medicine was 18.4 months (median=6 months; maximum=3 years).
2 Of the 111 respondents who took a leave of absence of 6 months or more, 45.9% took the time to take care of children or other family members. Women accounted for 88% of these pediatricians.

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