



Personal & Professional Growth Working Part-time

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Welcome to this podcast by *Doctor's Digest*, bridging the gap between the BUSINESS of Medicine and the PRACTICE of Medicine with single-topic manuals that provide practice solutions from the experts.

Although physicians in some specialties tend to work more hours than others, the average physician clocks significantly more than the standard five eight-hour days. Physicians in anesthesiology, obstetrics and gynecology, general surgery, and urology report averages above 60 hours per week. Dermatology, emergency medicine, and pathology doctors clock in on the low end, but still hover around 46 hours per week.

There are no definitive statistics on the subject, but many physicians choose to work part-time at some point during their careers. In addition to caring for young children, there are a variety of other motivations for physicians to work part-time. Easing into retirement, pursuing additional education, and making time for entrepreneurial ventures top the list. Along with the obvious benefit of working a less-than-100-percent schedule—more time for other pursuits—there are also some challenges. Earning less money is one, and there are a variety of logistical issues. More subtle challenges also come into play, including the reaction of colleagues when a physician makes the decision to work less. Physicians who want more time for themselves or their children may have to (a) ignore judgments about what a physician “should” do, and (b) quiet their own nagging doubts.

Once a physician makes the decision to scale back to part-time, the question becomes how to do it. Physicians may have to get creative to come up with their own plan. Some physicians may be able to cut down while continuing in their current practices.

For those with a full patient load, reducing hours or days at the office may need to be done gradually so as not to overburden colleagues. For solo physicians or those in a small group, a good first step might be to close the practice to new patients or, with proper notice, to stop participating in some insurance plans.

Job-sharing is one alternative—and not an uncommon one for husband-wife physician teams and physicians who have young children. If more than one physician in an office are considering a switch to part-time, it may be possible to work out sharing and cross-coverage arrangements with other doctors.

When looking for new opportunities, it pays to look beyond what the employment ad in the back of the journal says. An organization or community experiencing a shortage of physicians may be more open to negotiating a part-time position—even when their first preference might be to have a full-time employee.

For those interested in segueing from full-time to part-time within the same organization, it pays to make yourself indispensable on the job so that when you eventually request cutting back to part-time, the group or employer will make it happen rather than lose a valuable player.

But, before you take the plunge, make sure your financial house is in order. A financial planner or accountant can help with this.

For more tips and ideas to enhance your Personal and Professional Growth, please see the November/December 2007 issue of Doctor's Digest.

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