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SURVEY: MANY OLDER PHYSICIANS PLAN TO OPT OUT OF PATIENT CARE

Most Would Not Recommend Medicine As A Career

IRVING, TEXAS – In the next one to three years, 48 percent of physicians between the ages of 50 and 65 are planning to retire, seek non-clinical jobs, work part-time, close their practices to new patients, and/or significantly reduce the number of patients they see, a new survey indicates. The survey, conducted by Merritt Hawkins & Associates, a national physician search and consulting firm based in Irving, Texas, suggests that many experienced physicians are seeking a way out of traditional patient care roles.

“When Baby Boom doctors entered medicine they had control over how they practiced and the fees they charged,” notes Mark Smith, executive vice president of Merritt Hawkins & Associates. “But the rules changed on them in mid-stream and now many are looking for a ticket out.”

The survey indicates that 24 percent of older physicians plan to opt out of patient care in the next one to three years. Fourteen percent of these physicians said they plan to retire in the next one to three years, seven percent said they plan to seek a medical job in a non-patient care setting, and three percent said they plan to pursue a business or job in a non-medical field.

The survey also indicates that many older doctors, while staying in patient care roles, plan to reduce the number of patients they see in the next one to three years. Twelve percent of physicians surveyed said they would start working part-time in the next one to three years, eight percent said they would either close their practices to new patients or significantly reduce their patient load, and four percent indicated that they plan to work on a temporary basis.

Should older physicians elect to remove themselves from patient care or significantly reduce the number of patients they see, access to physicians would be greatly reduced, according to Smith.

“Almost half the physicians in the United States are 50 years old or older,” Smith observes. “An exodus of older doctors from medicine would be a disaster for patient care in this country.”

Younger doctors not as hard working?

The survey further indicates that many older physicians are underwhelmed by the work ethic of today’s younger physicians. Sixty-eight percent of older physicians surveyed indicated that physicians coming out of training today are less dedicated and hard working than physicians who came out of training 20 to 30 years ago.

“Whether valid or not, many older physicians see themselves as more wedded to medicine than are younger doctors,” Smith notes.

The survey suggests that disillusionment among experienced physicians runs deep. Forty-four percent of physicians surveyed indicated that they would not choose medicine as a career if they were starting out today. The majority (57 percent) indicated that they would not recommend medicine as a career to their children or to young people.

Over 1,170 physicians between the ages of 50 and 65 participated in the survey. Results of the survey are available on Merritt Hawkins & Associates’ web site at www.merrithawkins.com.

About Merritt Hawkins & Associates

Merritt Hawkins & Associates specializes in the permanent placement of physicians and advanced allied health care professionals. It is the largest provider of physician recruiting services in the United States and is a division of AMN Healthcare Services, Inc. (NYSE: AHS), the largest health care staffing firm in the United States.