1 in 3 Physicians Plans to Quit within 10 Years

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Blaming low compensation and the hassles of healthcare reform, 34% of physicians say they plan to leave the practice of medicine over the next decade, according to a new national survey.

The online survey of 2,218 physicians by Atlanta-based healthcare staffing recruiters Jackson Healthcare also found that 16% of the respondents said they will, or are strongly considering retiring, leaving medicine, or going part-time in 2012.

Sheri Sorrell, market research manager for Jackson Healthcare, says many of the essay responses from responding physicians were quite lengthy and emotional, especially as they related their reactions to the sweeping changes in medicine that will be brought on by healthcare reform and market demands.

“Some doctors wrote books for us in here. A lot of them are very concerned about the depersonalization and corporatization of medicine,” Sorrell says. “It used to be the family doctor treated your family for years basing the decisions on what is best for you and your family. Whereas an employed doctor not only has to take into account not only what is best for you and your family but also what the organization will allow him to do and what the organization’s guidelines for treating you are.”

Of those physicians who said they plan to retire or leave medicine this year, 56% cited economic factors and 51% cited health reform as among the major factors. Of those physicians who said they are strongly considering leaving medicine in 2012, 55% or 97 physicians, were under age 55.

“That’s what we were most surprised about; that the majority of the folks that were considering leaving medicine or planning to leave medicine this year were under 55 years old. The key takeaway is that they’re not retiring; they’re quitting,” Sorrell says.

The online survey was conducted between April 19–27, before the U.S. Supreme Court’s affirmation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. While most physicians in the survey panned the ACA, they often did so for different reasons.

“They are upset on both ends of the political spectrum,” Sorrell says. “There is a certain amount of doctors who feel like the ACA went way too far with the government stepping in between them and their patients. And the other group says we didn’t go far enough. We need a single-payer system in this country if we are going to address the challenges of medicine. You see both contingents and they are equally displeased. It’s implement and improve versus repeal and replace.”

Sorrell says Jackson Healthcare will continue to survey physicians to see if they make good on their threats to leave, or if they’re just angry about the overall state of healthcare delivery and compensation. “It will be interesting to see in the coming years how
this bears out; if really the folks who are strongly considering leaving really did,” she says.

The survey also found that specialists were more inclined to leave medicine in the next decade, including:

- Oncologists and hematologists — 57% said they would retire by 2022
- Otolaryngologists — 49% said they would retire in the next decade
- General Surgeons — 49% said they would retire by 2022
- Cardiologists — 45% said they would retire in the next decade
- Urologists — 42% said they would retire by 2022

**MARKET WATCH**

Physician attrition in the next 10 years is significant.

The majority of physicians surveyed (84 percent) will continue practicing medicine through 2013. The remaining 16 percent plan to transition to part-time, retire or leave medicine, or they are considering doing so.

![Career Plans for 2012–2013](chart)

- Will be practicing medicine in 2012–13: 84%
- Completely retiring or leaving medicine in 2012: 8%
- Considering retirement or leaving medicine in 2012: 7%
- Going part-time (contract work or locum tenens): 1%
Physicians Leaving Medicine or Considering Doing So in 2012

What reasons do physicians give for retiring or leaving the practice of medicine? They cite a mix of factors such as:

- Economic factors such as medical malpractice insurance, overhead, electronic medical records, etc.
- Don’t want to practice in the era of healthcare reform
- Burned out
- Pursuing different career paths outside the practice of medicine
- Lifestyle choice
- Age 65+
- Retiring early because financially able

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†Please refer to the chart for specifics on audience and specialties. The booklet will be mailed to more than 30,000 physicians. Direct mail counts are based on counts provided by the AMA and are subject to change.

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