

Discharging a Patient

Once the physician establishes a physician/patient relationship, he/she may not abandon the patient without the threat of potential liability. The physician is obligated to continue treating the patient until the patient's condition no longer warrants it or the patient discharges the physician. The physician may also terminate the relationship by following these steps:

- Do not withdraw from caring for a patient who is in the midst of a medical crisis.
- Verbally discharge the patient in person.
- Confirm the discharge in a letter signed by the physician.
- Summarize the relationship with the patient.
- Establish a date for ending the relationship (2 weeks to 30 days depending on the patient's condition and the availability of a qualified physician).
- Describe the patient's current condition.
- Inform the patient of his/her need to select another physician.
- Indicate whether follow-up care should be immediate.
- Indicate prognosis if follow-up care is not obtained.
- Inform the patient of other physicians qualified to treat him/her.
- Tell the patient the physician will be available for emergencies or to treat acute conditions during the transition.
- Inform the patient the office will provide a copy of his/her medical record to another physician upon request and with written authorization.
- Inform the patient that the physician will consult with a new physician if requested.
- Send the letter to the patient by certified mail, return receipt requested, or hand deliver it to the patient.
- Enclose an authorization form for transfer of records.
- File the mail receipt with a copy of the letter.
- Send a second copy of the letter, if the certified letter is returned unclaimed, by regular mail and document the fact that this was done
- Inform the staff not to schedule a new appointment after the effective termination date

Sample Discharge Letter

date

Dear _____:
patient's name

I find it necessary to inform you that I will no longer be able to provide medical care to you because _____

reason for discharge

Since your condition requires continued medical attention, I suggest that you place yourself under the care of another physician without delay. If you desire, I will be available for emergency care and already scheduled appointments for a reasonable time after you receive this letter, but in no event later than

30 days date

This should give you ample time to select a physician of your choice from the many competent practitioners in this area. You may want to call the local county medical society at _____ or the local hospital's physician referral service for their
phone number

assistance in locating a new physician. With your written authorization, I will make a copy of your medical records available to your new physician.

Very truly yours,

physician's name