



What Are Your Ex-Employees Taking with Them?

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Decades ago, it was reasonable to imagine that one could work for the same company from the start of one's career to the end. Think about the world portrayed in *Mad Men*. Don Draper has mostly worked with the same fictional co-workers – Roger Sterling, Pete Campbell, Joan Harris, Bert Cooper, etc. – for the better part of a decade. This is not just a function of Matthew Weiner keeping the same actors around; it's a relatively accurate portrayal of work in the 1960s.

Times are different now. Workers change jobs (and often careers) with far more regularity than they did in the years following World War II. Medical practices are no different. They experience turnover just like other businesses. Each time an employee leaves – whether voluntarily or otherwise – he or she can depart with valuable information and patient relationships. The higher an employee's perch in a practice, the more likely it is that he or she can go to a competitor and move patients in the process.

Thus, the prudent medical practice decision-maker prepare for this possibility. The advice that you give patients on the proverbial ounce of prevention applies just as much to taking steps to prevent employees from taking your confidential information and patient relationships when they leave.

Here are some best practices to follow before and immediately after an employee defects:

- 1. Have agreements in place**
- 2. Think through your key information and take steps to protect it**
- 3. Make clear that employees cannot misuse the practice's computer system**
- 4. Pay for the employee's cell phone**
- 5. Preserve the hard drive**

Computers are expensive. Hard drives are not. The moment that an employee resigns and says that he or she is leaving and going to a competitor, pull the hard drive out of his computer and keep it in a drawer. You'll be surprised what you can find on it.

In summary, dealing with departing employees is a three-stage process. There is the planning stage beforehand and then there is the preserving and investigating after the resignation/termination. Handle all three stages well and you will be well-prepared in the event that your Don Draper decides that he is going to make a change.

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