

Rebuttal: Should older family physicians retire?

Michel Racine MD CCMF FCFP

YES

Retirement requires forethought and careful preparation, financially, physically, and psychologically. We need to talk it through with our financial advisor, family, friends, colleagues, and patients. It is a lot easier to accept retirement when we choose the date ourselves. Retirement should be a gradual process that leaves us in better health, with better relationships with our families. Many physicians report that their retirement years are the best years of their lives.

Finances. There are not many articles on this subject, but some physicians keep working because they cannot afford to stop. Even though they earn much more than the average Canadian, some physicians spend more than they make, get bad financial advice, make bad investment decisions, or go through their savings. Few Canadians would feel sympathy for them, not even their patients.

My identity as a physician. My identity has been shaped by my life experiences: my triumphs, my dreams, my hopes, and my mistakes. These experiences have informed my life. My career in medicine has also helped to make me who I am, but it is no longer necessary to my development. In recent years, I have developed other interests, and I look forward to years of exploring them without working.

Altruism. Some physicians continue practising out of a sense of duty or out of fear of abandoning their patients and ending relationships built on trust. Yet, a medical practice can come to an abrupt end for health reasons or because of failing skills. Would it not be better to plan in advance and to let our patients know that we plan to retire? This would allow them to

prepare themselves psychologically. To my surprise, some of my patients have already found new physicians or have asked to be transferred to colleagues. A new physician who is currently training in my setting might join our team; he could take over the care of my other patients.

Slowing down. Decreasing our work hours, letting go of the more demanding tasks, and developing an area of expertise for which our colleagues will continue to seek us out are all ways to end a career with a sense of satisfaction and of a job well done.

Staying in the loop. Acting as a role model for younger physicians is laudable; however, we need to make room for them, so that they can bring their fresh ideas and expertise to the practice. I do not want to stay in the field of medicine in case I need medical care in the future. I have my own family physician. He is younger than I and he works in a well-organized, proficient medical clinic. I think that is preparation enough for me.

I will not be called *Doctor* quite as often, but I will continue to put *MD* after my signature. And if I hear a flight attendant ask, "Is there a doctor on the plane?" I will still be the first to respond, just like any Good Samaritan. 🍁

Dr Racine is a family physician in Laval, Que.

Competing interests

None declared

Correspondence

Dr Michel Racine, Cité de la Santé de Laval, Médecine Familiale, 1755 René Laënnec, Laval, QC H7M 3L9; telephone 450 975-5444; fax 450 975-5497; e-mail michel.racine9@sympatico.ca

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