

# Planning Your Golden Years

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Many physicians enter practice with the goal of retiring to some interesting avocation when they hit their mid-50s. Some actually do it, some retire only to find retirement frustrating and unrewarding, and some try to retire, but end up working more and more. What's the secret to that successful retirement?

It's all about planning. You didn't become a physician on a whim one day. It took considerable planning, following the "road map" from sciences in high school to a pre-med curriculum in undergrad, medical school, residency, perhaps fellowship and then practice. It's the same for your next career step only you don't have anyone handing you a road map to follow. This time, you'll need to create your own. Here's how.

### First, know what you want to do.

Remember, it's retirement, it doesn't need to make sense, and you shouldn't need to make a "replacement income" for your practice. This should be about "wants" rather than "needs." Nevertheless, when you've had a lifelong unwavering career focus, deciding what you want isn't necessarily a simple task. Take your time, talk with friends and even take an interests or behavioral work assessment. There's nothing wrong with sorting through some indecision and options to decide on what you may be doing for as many years as you've practiced — think about that.

**Second, develop your road map.** We talk with many physicians who may think they know exactly what they want to do and possess the general skill set, but they don't have the credentials needed to open the doors. So determine the credentials (credentials mean accomplishments, not additional degrees) necessary, and write down both a set of actions and an accompanying timeline.

**Third, develop your credentials.** Let's say you want to become a writer, but the only things you've published are some research papers from residency. How do you begin? How do you implement your road map? Think small — a local newspaper, perhaps a medical society magazine, even a church bulletin. Think about a publication that will print your work just because it's you. You're writing for free, but you need

to do your best work. Once you're published, publish more. If they like your writing, ask how often they'll let you submit articles. After you've developed a folder of published work, pitch yourself to a larger publication, and follow the same process. Keep growing, pursuing your new road map to your destination.

The same is true regardless of the field. Do you want to be a health care consultant? Develop a project outline and volunteer your services at your local hospital. If they like your work, do another and another to build a portfolio of projects. Then ask the hospital CEO if she'll be a reference, because you'd like to consult to other organizations, but you'd like them to pay for your work.

Many physicians want to be public speakers.

We know a physician whose expertise is GLBT issues in adolescents. We advised her to seek out service organizations to test her mettle. She did just that, starting small, being invited to return, and now she's charging more and more for her programs.

**The fourth and final step in the process is to grow.** Over time, you can develop a body of work in just about any field that interests you. However, just like your medical career, it won't happen overnight. It is a developmental process leading to a respected set of credentials. Growing in your new field then means selling yourself, developing ways to promote yourself, like a website, and tracking your work — looking for measurable benefits and outcomes for your work. ■

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