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# BRADFORD S. PONTZ, M.D.

FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

## **What my practice was like before concierge**

We were successful and a very busy practice; I had worked for the group for about 14 years. We had been completely independent.

About five years before the concierge transition, we joined a medical group that was new and forming in our area. The medical group did offer some advantages financially — we were able to, through them, negotiate better reimbursement with some of our commercial payers. And we did do better overall financially with that group.

The challenge was that a lot of the newer contracts we were able to take advantage of through that group involved performance types of reimbursement models, with a need for lots of documentation of quality measures.

And it really did introduce a lot of burdens. It almost felt like I was not able to deliver the medical care that I was comfortable with.

## **Why I decided to explore concierge medicine**

I had been familiar with concierge medicine for a number of years before we actually made the decision. I knew several physicians who had made the transition, including two who left the group that I

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**Practice Name:** NOVAMED Associates

**Years as a Concierge Doctor:** 2

**Concierge Vendor:** Specialdocs Consultants

**Medical School:** Temple University  
School of Medicine

worked with to establish their own solo concierge practices. At the time that those physicians did it, I felt they had been in practice in the area a bit longer than I had; they were older than I was. There was another physician in our group who was closer to my tenure, and I felt that he and I were just not quite ready.

But as time went on, and I saw the various challenges with the models I've described, it became clear to me that the concierge model really offered the best advantages.

## **The benefits I've experienced from transitioning to concierge medicine**

The benefits are numerous. We have significantly fewer patients than we used to in the practice; I have about 25% to 30% of the patients that I used to have. So with a change of that magnitude, we are really able

to spend a lot more time with our patients and just deliver a lot more for them. We can spend about twice as much time for each patient's visit. It means we can be a lot more thorough with our care, we can address all the patient's questions or complaints when they come in for a visit. And the pace of the visit is more relaxed.

We have more time to be available in other ways. The patients have my email address, and they my personal cell phone number. They can contact me if there's something urgent comes up.



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***The biggest challenge I faced during my practice transition***

The biggest challenge was wrestling with the fact that, by definition, there were some patients of mine who were going to be forced to move to another physician. And these were often patients who had been long-time patients of mine that I had enjoyed working with; we had a good relationship. And they would have been happy to stay with me except for this transition. And so I did have to make sure that I was comfortable with it.

But we took a lot of steps to mitigate any adverse effects. We worked with a large number of other practices in the area who were doing what we would call traditional practice. And we made sure that there were practices we knew and respected in the area that could absorb these patients. I spoke to those practices directly myself, and we created a list of best practices for the patients.

We did have the ability to enroll a small number of patients on what we call scholarship basis, which means the patients do not need to pay the annual membership fee. And we did that for a few particularly elderly or complicated patients where it would be a real unfortunate event if they would need to transition to another physician. The vast majority of the patients who chose not to move with us and enter the concierge model said, "I understand why you're doing this and I wish you well."

Interestingly, in the 2 1/2 years since our enrollment period, we have had a number of those patients come back to the practice.

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***If I could do the practice transition again, what would I do differently?***

***"Our days are fulfilling, and we're able to feel proud of the care we're delivering."***



We were a bit short staffed during the transition period. It is a busy time, because you're still trying to do all the medical topics of a visit, while also having a brief conversation about your concierge transition during each visit. If I had to do that over again, I probably would have just hired some temporary help for the transition, because it was a stressful period for the physicians and the support staff.

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***How concierge has affected my feelings of burnout, work-life balance and career satisfaction***

I love being a physician, I love taking care of patients and knowing them over a period of time as their primary care doctor. It was just the high volume nature of the patient load and the need for chart documentation that was really taking time away from my personal life. I'm spending less time after hours doing chart work.

Because I used to be so busy seeing a large number of complicated patients each day, I wouldn't get a chance to do all my charting during the day. It was really starting to create a personal life that was untenable. So I'm

happy to have a bit more time for my family on evenings and weekends.

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***Why I chose my concierge vendor***

I did a fairly thorough analysis of different concierge consulting companies about three years ago as we were preparing.

We chose Specialdocs Consultants, and, for us, they've been a great fit. They have a lot of experience in the field. They offer a lot of flexibility and seem to understand that every practice is different. And there is not a need for every practice's transition period to be exactly the same and a certain protocol. Nor does every practice need to look and operate exactly the same on the far side of the transition. They are a small enough group that we've really had the opportunity to get to know them. We've been very happy with the experience.

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***My advice for physicians considering concierge***

Don't be afraid of the transition. I think there are a number of physicians out there who are understandably put off by some of the risks associated with it. But the rewards really are there.

One does need to do some type of analysis of the practice and make sure that you can support it economically. But I would encourage everyone to have confidence in their own practice and in their own relationship with their patients. There may be more interest among their patients than they initially realize.

Other concierge physicians have said what I'm about to say: One of my few regrets is that I didn't make the transition earlier. I'm glad I've made it now. ■