

# Physician Briefing Series | **Practice Integration**

Successful transitions from independent practice to NorthShore Medical Group for physicians and patients



## Physician Briefing Series | Practice Integration



Dear Colleague,

The decision to leave independent practice and join a medical group isn't an easy one.

But at NorthShore Medical Group we take great pride in our demonstrated ability to successfully integrate private practice physicians into our group. We approach each opportunity with respect for the attributes that have made each practice successful, and with the goal of achieving a mutually beneficial outcome.

As the testimonials here demonstrate, every situation is unique. We approach each one with a fresh perspective and a determination to work as partners in achieving a smooth transition. I invite you to read these integration success stories and learn more about what makes NorthShore Medical Group a better place to practice.

**Joseph Golbus, MD**

*President, NorthShore University HealthSystem Medical Group*

# Joining a Medical Group: Addressing Physicians' Top Concerns

NorthShore Medical Group provides a host of support services to assist physicians and staff with the transition.

## **How can I manage the transition and still focus on caring for my patients?**

At NorthShore Medical Group, we will guide you through every step to ensure a successful transition. Our Onboarding Team includes members of nearly every department at NorthShore – from human resources, marketing, accounting, technology and other areas – all coordinating behind the scenes on your behalf, to make the transition smooth and seamless for you, your staff and your patients.

## **Where will I practice?**

Our goal, like yours, is to identify the best location to support the growth and success of your practice. In some situations, the optimal site is your current location, however, in others, it may be beneficial for you to join with other physicians in another nearby facility. In all cases, we'll discuss the options with you and come to a mutually beneficial agreement.

## **What happens to my staff?**

We understand that physicians and staff who work together for years become a close-knit team. We want to preserve that. A Human Resources representative will meet with you to learn about the roles performed by the members of your staff in order to understand how the current roles align to the NorthShore practice structure. Our intent with practice integrations is to retain the value of your business, which includes your staff. We will work with you to make the staffing decisions that support your business operations.

## **How will I learn the new technology?**

Our customized EMR system, called Epic, is recognized as one of the most advanced and comprehensive electronic medical records systems in the country. It's an important asset that our physicians and staff have come to rely on, and

that helps us to provide superior care to patients. To help you get up-to-speed on the technology, we design a customized learning work path for you based on your knowledge and comfort level. In addition to on-line tools and resources, one of our senior Epic trainers, seasoned RNs and technology experts, will come to your office and work with you and your staff side-by-side to successfully integrate Epic into your practice. You'll also have the benefit of templates and tools built by colleagues in your specialty and access to ongoing resources to maximize your skill so that Epic works for you.

## **How will my patients adapt?**

We work hard to make the patient experience a positive one and to assure that the transition is seamless. In addition to retaining their ongoing relationships with you and your staff, as part of the Medical Group, your patients will also be offered the benefit of connecting with your practice through NorthShoreConnect. This web-based tool allows them to communicate with your practice through a secure link between their home computer and our EMR. They can schedule appointments, send and receive messages, refill prescriptions and access test results – services that we've found enhance patient loyalty and advance patient care. Many integrated practices also are linked to our centralized Practice Support Team, a group of off-site representatives who use our EMR to provide personalized attention to patient calls– from processing prescription refill requests and delivering messages, to scheduling appointments and placing reminder calls. This team serves as a behind-the-scenes support so that your front office staff can greet each patient, and busy periods in the office do not jeopardize phone access.

***To learn more, check out these stories from physicians who have successfully made the transition to our Group.***

## Integration Stories

Steven Eisenstein, MD, Northbrook  
Joined NorthShore Medical Group May 2008



### **Q. Where were you practicing before joining the Medical Group?**

**A.** I'd been in a practice with another doctor here in Northbrook for 17 years, including more than a decade at the same location, so together we had built a pretty strong and loyal patient base.

### **Q. What made you think it was time to join a group?**

**A.** As the economy started going downhill in 2008, we began to reevaluate our position. It's a complicated business, being proprietors of a medical practice, with the regulations, compliance issues, OSHA, etc. Plus we felt it was really time we join the electronic age with our medical records, which we knew would be a huge undertaking and a major investment.

### **Q. What attracted you to NorthShore Medical Group?**

**A.** When they approached us, we could see immediate, practical advantages to joining – benefits, the ability to earn more, and not having to deal with the insurance companies. Plus we were already accustomed to working with Highland Park Hospital, which was nearby.

### **Q. Were there any unique challenges with your situation?**

**A.** We wanted to stay where we were. We owned the building, and it was in a really good, accessible location – right in the heart of a vibrant community, on a well-trafficked thoroughfare and close to other healthcare facilities.

### **Q. How was that resolved?**

**A.** The Medical Group was willing to work with us. We were able to stay in our building and the Medical Group has taken over the lease payments and all the overhead. It's a great arrangement, and we really appreciated their flexibility.

### **Q. How did the transition go?**

**A.** Nothing like this is ever easy, but the Medical Group did everything it could to smooth the way. They provide a nice toolbox. It's all ready-made – EMR, office management, all sorts of backup like specialty care and hospitalists. It's really turn-key instead of starting from scratch. Plus they extended employment offers to all our staff, which was important, because we've been working together for a long time.

### **Q. What happened to your practice after the transition?**

**A.** We've actually grown since joining. We'd been here so long that we sort of assumed we were well-known by everybody. But we found that the contacts and referrals through the Medical Group have really brought a lot of new patients in. And we've added two new physicians to the practice.

### **Q. What do you think has been the key to the successful transition?**

**A.** I give a lot of credit to the Medical Group for its flexibility. They don't take a "one-size-fits-all" approach, and that's been a big part of our successful experience.

## Integration Stories

David Soo, MD, Gurnee  
Joined NorthShore Medical Group January 2005



### **Q. Where were you practicing before joining NorthShore Medical Group?**

**A.** I was in independent practice with two colleagues since 2001, but before that we were part of a large group practice beginning in 1986.

### **Q. What was your experience with that group before going out on your own?**

**A.** We weren't happy with some of the group's policies, particularly when it came to compensation. The original partners were paid more, without any connection to their productivity or what they contributed on a day-to-day basis.

### **Q. What made you decide to go back to a large group practice?**

**A.** The malpractice crisis of 2003 caused our costs to get totally out of control. It threatened to swallow us up. So we began exploring our options. We looked at one of the other large groups, but they had a compensation system that we felt wasn't right for us. Basically, your compensation was unrelated to what you brought in.

### **Q. How did you come to NorthShore Medical Group?**

**A.** I called the Chairman of Family Medicine to explore the possibility of joining NorthShore. As we looked into it, we found that NorthShore had a much fairer, more realistic point of view on physician compensation. You're rewarded based on productivity, which is how we operated in our private practice.

### **Q. And have you found the decision paid off for you?**

**A.** Absolutely. Between reduced expenses and higher reimbursement rates, we're enjoying far greater financial rewards. The compensation is definitely better than in private practice.

### **Q. How did the integration process go?**

**A.** NorthShore Medical Group really set itself apart from the outset. The other group we considered basically said, "Here's our offer – take it or leave it." But with NorthShore it was an actual conversation, with give and take and we appreciated that approach.

### **Q. What else changed for you?**

**A.** The Medical Group actually built a beautiful, brand new state-of-the-art facility for us right across the parking lot. It's great – 17,000 square feet, all modern equipment and now we're part of a multi-specialty practice. This is something we could not have done on our own, and for us it signaled that NorthShore was confident in our potential and encouraging of our future growth.

### **Q. How did your patients react to the change?**

**A.** They love it. Our patients now have more options, with evening and weekend hours, which is important because people these days are so pressed for time. And being part of a group means there's always someone there to cover, so our patients are better served.

### **Q. What's been the most important benefit of joining NorthShore Medical Group?**

**A.** The most important thing to me is that I'm able to do what I've been trained to do: practice medicine. Because now I don't have the added burden and risk of running my own business.

## Integration Stories

Michael Rosenbaum, MD, Skokie  
Joined NorthShore Medical Group July 2008



### **Q. Where were you practicing before joining the Medical Group?**

**A.** I was in private practice with one other physician in Skokie since 1991. We were part of an IPA with another hospital.

### **Q. What made you start thinking about joining a group?**

**A.** I was losing my ardor for the business side of the practice. The employment issues, insurance issues, IPA issues – all those things were just taking so much of my time. Also, being a small practice in a world of increasingly larger practices wasn't easy.

### **Q. What other issues were you facing?**

**A.** At that time, even before the presidential election and the healthcare debate, it was clear that everything was moving toward electronic medical records. And we knew that would be a tremendous expense for a small practice, in terms of time and money.

### **Q. What made you think NorthShore Medical Group might be the group to join?**

**A.** I'd known one of the pediatricians in the Medical Group for many years. We'd run into each other at social occasions and started talking more about the business. He was really happy and it seemed a lot of the things I was complaining about weren't an issue for him. He said that as part of the Medical Group he was able to concentrate more on medicine, which was a major selling point.

### **Q. How did the integration process go?**

**A.** They brought the two of us into an office with five other physicians, three of whom I've

known for years, so it was an easy transition from that standpoint. I knew we were all going to get along. And the nursing staff was phenomenal, too.

### **Q. What has that extra support meant to you, being part of a larger office?**

**A.** Being on call was always a really busy time – I was always feeling like I was either coming off call or anticipating calls. And now there's been a couple times where I'd almost forgotten I was on call because I'd get just an occasional page. Also, having radiology and all those other services right here in the building is a huge benefit, to me and my patients.

### **Q. How was the transition to an EMR?**

**A.** The support we received was great. Between the designated Epic team members assigned to help us and the doctors and nurses we work with every day, it made the transition a lot easier. My only limitation is my typing skills!

### **Q. Has the compensation been better?**

**A.** It worked out very well. I was concerned about that, and about losing patients in the transition, but actually my compensation the first year out was already better than the previous year, so I was very happy about that.

### **Q. So you feel you made the right move?**

**A.** I feel really lucky being part of the Medical Group. I know that I have that marketing power behind me, which is helping to bring patients in and build my practice.

## Integration Stories

Steven Meyers, MD, Skokie  
Joined NorthShore Medical Group December 2009



### **Q. Where were you practicing before joining NorthShore Medical Group?**

**A.** I had my own private neurology practice for more than 10 years at Skokie Hospital, and before that I was part of the Rush system. When the hospital became part of the NorthShore system I had the option to stay, leave or join the group.

### **Q. What made you want to join the group?**

**A.** First, I was tired of doing it all on my own – dealing with all the administrative and business aspects of running a practice. Second, all the changes going on in healthcare, including the conversion to electronic medical records, were making things much more complex. Third, paying for benefits for my family was really expensive.

### **Q. What were some of your concerns about joining a group?**

**A.** I was used to being my own boss. I didn't have to answer to anyone, so if I wanted to buy a new piece of equipment, for example, I would just do it. So dealing with a big bureaucracy was a major concern. Also, I assumed there would be a pay cut – everyone always said you make more in private practice.

### **Q. How did those concerns play out once you joined?**

**A.** First of all, I'm making more money, which was a pleasant surprise. That's partly due to better insurance contracts the group has negotiated, but it's also because the group helps me run my practice much more efficiently. Now there's never a hole in my schedule, because the staff here make reminder calls and fill in gaps from the waiting list. Plus the billing and collections experts make sure I'm paid appropriately for everything I do.

### **Q. What about your concerns about bureaucracy?**

**A.** Everyone here, from the administrators to the department chairs to the other physicians, is very easy to deal with. When you want something, the answer is "Let's figure out a way to get this done."

### **Q. How was the transition managed?**

**A.** It went very smoothly. I met regularly with the practice manager and the department Vice President to discuss my needs and we set up a new office that worked for both my patients and me. On the first day I was facing both a brand new work situation and dealing with EPIC for the first time, but I had so much support and help that we didn't miss a beat.

### **Q. How does being part of a group differ from being on your own?**

**A.** Before, I didn't interact with a lot of other physicians. Now I feel I'm part of something bigger. After establishing myself here I was appointed to a leadership position based on my experience and interests. As Vice Chair of Quality, I now represent the department in developing programs to improve patient care and I'm involved in various technology initiatives, which interest me. So I'm really contributing to making things better for patients and physicians.

### **Q. So do you feel you made the right decision?**

**A.** Absolutely. My only regret is that I didn't join years ago. The compensation, the benefits, the staff support, the lifestyle – it's all better.



## **Medical Group**

9977 Woods Drive

Skokie, IL 60077

(847) 570-8917

[NorthShore.org/Medical-Group](http://NorthShore.org/Medical-Group)

[physicianrecruitment@northshore.org](mailto:physicianrecruitment@northshore.org)