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Doctors and Attorneys: Perfect Together! Jeffrey J. Zenna, Esq., LLM

Most physicians in practice today have used the services of an attorney to form some type of partnership (like an LLC) or other corporate structure, as well as for routine matters such as leases and other contracts. Usually, this is a trying experience, so doctors, like many others, try their best to otherwise avoid lawyers.

But doctors should try to be more open minded when it comes to using legal services. In fact, physicians who treat patients who suffer from traumatic injuries can dramatically help their patients- and their own practices- with services provided by a personal injury attorney.

While this may sound counterintuitive, as the phrase “personal injury attorney” usually is one doctors don’t want to hear, there are ways the services of such legal professionals can improve patient care and a medical practice’s situation. Here are five ways this can happen:

1. An attorney who specializes in representing people with personal injuries, can, at no cost to the patient or the physician, ensure all medical bills for professional services are submitted to the **proper** insurance carrier. For example, depending on how and why an injury occurs, bills must be submitted to either workers compensation carriers, no fault auto insurers, Medicare, Medicaid, or the appropriate private insurance carrier. Billing the appropriate carrier at the outset can improve the cash flow of a practice, save on processing costs, and ensure that the patient meets appropriate deductibles, which can save him or her considerable amounts of money.
2. If a physician believes that specific types of treatment are necessary, but the insurance carrier will not authorize the suggested protocols, an attorney can often initiate **arbitration or other legal remedies** in an effort to have carriers pay for the prescribed treatments. In most instances treatment can be authorized with a minimum delay and at no cost to the patient or physician.
3. In a situation where an attorney represents an injured patient in a negligence case because of an auto accident, fall or other similar claim, an attorney can incorporate into a legal case a **demand for medical co-pays or deductibles** not covered by insurance. This can be of significant economic benefit to the patient.
4. In a situation in which a physician is treating a patient with no health care an attorney can, in many instances, issue a **Letter of Protection** to the doctor on behalf of the patient that the lawyer is representing in a personal injury case. This letter, authorized by patient/client, will ensure that the attorney will compensate the doctor for services rendered out of any settlement

or other compensation that is recovered through the legal process. This is of clear benefit to a medical practice, which can then treat a patient with knowledge that the costs involved will be handled by another party.

5. In the event a patient has serious injuries that render him or her incapable of working, an attorney (with a doctor's assistance) **file a claim for Social Security Disability** on behalf of the patient.

The service of a qualified attorney who specializes in personal injury litigation can not only assist your patient in recovering monetary damages, but also assist your practice in the ways described above. The fact is that both doctors and patients can benefit dramatically from such services. The sooner an attorney is brought into a personal injury situation and can evaluate the matter, the sooner he or she will be able to assist your patient and your practice. A personal injury attorney who represents your patient will ensure that all costs associated with patient care will be appropriately addressed. This will permit you and your staff to deliver better medical care and ultimately improve the relationship with your patient.

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