

I was "dumped" as a patient — What now? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I've been with same pain specialist for 10 years. He wrote me a letter and dumped me as a patient. Why did this happen? What can I do?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Getting “dumped” by anyone can hurt, but having the relationship with your health care provider terminated can have consequences for your health. While there are valid reasons why a provider may dismiss a patient, you should be aware of your rights as a patient ^[2] (which can vary from state to state). Additionally, if the reason(s) for your dismissal were not made clear to you, it's recommended that you ask for clarification. Though the circumstances that led your pain specialist to write the letter aren't included in your question, there's a range of reasons for why this can occur — not all of which may apply to your situation. Some common reasons why a health care provider may stop seeing a patient include:

- Failure to pay for services
- Failure to keep scheduled appointments
- Failure or inability to adhere to the treatment plan
- Seductive behavior towards physician or staff
- Violence, threatening staff members, or criminal activity
- Falsifying or providing misleading medical history

Now that you have been “dumped” as a patient by your pain specialist, there are different ways you can proceed if you want to take action. Generally, the least aggressive methods are recommended to try to reconcile peacefully and respectfully. If requested, your provider may be willing to explain to you why this decision was made. Some other options you may consider include:

- **Seeking an informal resolution:** You could consider speaking with a different health care provider to see if s/he can take over your care.
- **Asking for/getting a referral:** In some states, health care providers are required to not only give adequate notice of termination in writing, but they must provide assistance in

locating care elsewhere. If this is not required in your state, your specialist may provide you with referrals anyway, as this is typically considered good practice. You can also be proactive and request that your pain specialist refer you to another health care provider for your pain management.

- **Filing a complaint with the state medical board:** Although historically, this option does not have a high rate of success, patients who are able to provide evidence for emotional and/or physical consequences of having their relationship with their health care provider terminated may be successful in having sanctions placed against the provider.
- **Suing for abandonment or infliction of severe emotional distress:** This option is not recommended for all situations of patient dismissal. If you are interested in pursuing this option, it's best to consult with a lawyer to see if this strategy is advisable in your situation.

Whether you seek a resolution with your previous provider or find a new one, hopefully these options can help you find a way to get back on track with managing your pain. No matter what you decide to do next, being on the same page about your treatment and the expectations of both you as the patient and your provider as the medical expert might be the key to finding reliable pain relief in the future.

Alice!

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