

SPECIAL REPORT: HEALTH CARE

Physicians Find The Strengths in Numbers

For Many Doctors, the Demands and Duties Of Private Practice Drive Them to Group Practices

BY EMMET PIERCE



Dr. Melanie Palm injects a hyaluronic acid filler to reestablish facial balance for one of her cosmetic patients at Art of Skin MD in Solana Beach. Hyaluronic acid fillers are used to restore volume loss due to the aging process and typically last between 6-12 months.

Concerned about the pressures associated with running a business of their own, many doctors in San Diego County and around the country are leaving independent practices to work for larger medical groups.

“I absolutely think that is true for a lot of people,” said Dr. **Melanie Palm**, a dermatologist who runs her own practice in Encinitas. “We have a reputation for being awful business people. To a certain degree that is true because our education doesn’t provide that foundation.”

Many doctors are not willing to put in the long hours that often are required to make an independent practice financially viable, she said. It’s much easier to become an employee and let someone else worry about administrative issues, such as seeking payments through medical insurance reimbursements.



Ted Mazer

Longtime San Diego physician **Ted Mazer**, president of the **California Medical Association**, said younger doctors are looking for a better balance between their work lives and their personal lives.

Change in Approach, Attitude

“A newer generation of physicians is coming out of an academia that doesn’t support private practice,” Mazer said.

Part of the reason young doctors are attracted to larger medical groups is that they avoid dealing directly with medical insurance, personnel issues, and controlling costs, he said. Although they may miss the satisfaction of building their own business, there are fewer bureaucratic headaches.

“The entire world of medicine is changing,” said Mazer, an ear, nose, and throat specialist. Young doctors “are looking for something different than what previous generations looked for. My generation was basically marrying medicine. Your primary goal was to serve the community’s medical needs. The new generation is coming out (of school) with a broader focus on lifestyle. They want more free time.”

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