

AbstractID: 14402 Title: Negotiation Challenges for Medical Physicists

Medical Physicist face, and often create for themselves, unique challenges in working out contracts for the provision of professional services. We are very often in the position of trying to sell something at a very high cost to someone who does not know or care what we do. The inclination is strong on both sides to not get bogged down in the details. Negotiation often tumbles to a simple matter of, "I'll take that job for this amount of money." Only later does it unfold that the two parties each had very different ideas of "normal expectations." While this cannot be completely avoided, especially in the context of rapid hospital administrator turnover, there are things that can be done to lengthen the Half-life of Despair.

Clear specifications of the scope of duties, areas of responsibility and authority, work environment and schedule, etc. should always be central to the process of agreeing to do work for pay. We must bear in mind that these things are necessary but not sufficient. Contracts exist as a useful tool for future recollection of the conversations that generate them, but ultimately the only parties that benefit from the existence of a contract in a situation gone bad are the attorneys who are engaged to parse it. A contract will not save you from a sinking ship.

Whether the contract is ever useful or not, contract negotiation is vitally important as a process. Contract negotiation is the moment in a relationship when one has the clearest opportunity to establish the tone of the relationship and to sample the culture of the organization. The negotiation period is the last time that everything will be possible. To be successful in that process a Medical Physicist is best served by having a very clear understanding of his/her own professional identity and a heightened awareness of the subtle messages that are sent from the other side. These are skills that many of us could stand to refine for ourselves.

In this brief presentation I will touch on some of the elements of a successful negotiation of acceptable terms to perform the professional work of a Medical Physicist, going beyond the well-known boilerplate elements of a professional contract to the more subtle and much more important challenge of framing the infrastructure of a sustainable relationship with strangers in a very short time.

Learning objectives:

1. Understand the difference between "taking a job" and "joining a practice."
2. Explore how professional identity influences the negotiation process.
3. Be reminded that work relationships are about working with people much more than about well-crafted contracts.
4. Understand the importance of a well-crafted contract.