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The Real Cost to Move Your Practice

Uncovering the numbers on relocation expenses

By Carrie Rossenfeld and Jennifer Duell Popovec

Most people dread moving, even if they are moving to a nicer locale or saving money by relocating. Part of it is the hassle of moving, but another thing to think about is the cost of moving, which includes more than just boxes and a moving truck.

Moving a medical office costs more than moving an apartment or house, experts note, so don't make the mistake of comparing the two. Although the total cost to move your office will depend entirely on the choices you make, the average move costs \$1 to \$5 per square foot including: moving supplies, packing, loading, unloading and unpacking.

If you have a 2,000-square-foot office, you can expect to spend \$2,000 to \$10,000 to get your belongings packed up, moved from one location to another and unloaded and unpacked. That number takes into account man hours (including your own employees), supplies and transportation costs.

Here, *MOT* shows you the real cost to move your practice.

Moving supplies

On average, moving supplies account for about 20 percent of moving costs, according to relocation experts. Of course, the amount of money you spend on packing supplies is based on how much stuff you have. If you hire professional movers, your packing and moving supplies might be included in the overall cost, but you need to check with your moving companies.

You can limit the amount of things you have to box by getting rid of it before the move. And, while you can rummage around in the dumpster for boxes or save boxes from other deliveries, chances are you'll need to buy boxes and packing tape for your move. You may even need to invest in specialty boxes for fragile items or items that require special security such as medical records and financial documents.

Packing up

When it comes to packing, practices can choose to do it internally or they can outsource. Practices usually make packing decisions based on two elements – speed and cost.

Don't assume that you'll be saving money if you choose to do your packing internally. If your staff is diverting their attention from regular business to pack up the office, you're still paying someone to pack up your office – and your day-to-day operations might suffer for it.

And, while packing may seem to require little or no skill, the opposite is true: professional packers know how to pack boxes to minimize breakage and how to use supplies most effectively and efficiently.

Moreover, because professionals handled the packing, any damage sustained during the move would likely be insured by the packing and/or moving company. And don't forget that professional packers fill boxes faster than someone who only moves every few years.

You can expect to pay professional packers either by the hour, and you may be able to roll those services into your contract with a moving company. Hourly fees range by city and region, but average cost is \$50 per hour for two packers.

Another option is to hire temporary workers to pack your office. Again, you'll be paying out of pocket for this service, and these temps likely won't have packing expertise unless you specifically request it. Temp workers are paid hourly, as well, so their efficiency and speed will certainly impact the cost to pack.

The move itself

Moving your belongings from one location to another can be done professionally or you can choose to do it internally. Again, speed and cost are key considerations, but you also want to think about liability.

If you choose to move on your own, you are responsible for any and all damage. And, if you ask your employees to help you, you are taking the risk if they injure themselves during the move.

If you have delicate and expensive equipment, you should think carefully about hiring a moving company with experience in medical moves. Movers with this kind of expertise are better equipped to handle medical equipment. However, they do charge more than traditional movers.

If you lease your equipment, you may be legally obligated to have the manufacturer (or the company from which you lease the equipment) move the equipment to your



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new location. Be warned that if you try to move it yourself you may violate your contract and be responsible for any damage or repairs.

"The sensitivity of equipment in a medical practice requires special handling which does incur extra moving costs," says Ernest P. Gates, Jr., president of Gates Healthcare Associates in Middleton, Mass.

There are ways around this extra cost, if you think creatively, says Benjamin Ticho, an ophthalmologist in Chicago Ridge, Ill., who moved his four-doctor practice without using a moving company. He scheduled routine maintenance for his medical equipment at the same time of the move, and the instrument supplier picked up the equipment from the old office and delivered it back to the new office.

You can also minimize the number of large and bulky items to be moved. Large items such as refrigerators, furniture and cabinetry take longer to load and unload. If these items are old, consider donating them to charity or selling them. Charities such as the Salvation Army and Goodwill will pick up bulky items.

The location of your new office also contributes to moving expenses. Many moving firms charge for mileage, even if the distance between the two offices seems negligible to you.

Additionally, the day of the week you choose to move also influences pricing. Most practices choose to move on the weekend to avoid disruption to patients and scheduling. Weekend moves, particularly those on Sunday, cost 20 to 25 percent more than weekday moves, according to experts. To avoid these extra charges, you may want to close your office early one or two days to accommodate the move.

If you use a professional moving company, discuss the different options and what they will cost. Most movers will work with you to find a solution that's within your budget.

Mini Case Study

In April 2010, Atlantic Relocation Systems in Alpharetta, Ga., moved Teens, Little Ones, & Children Pediatrics LLC. The moving company gave the pediatric group quotes for two different types of moves: one to another floor in the same building and one to a new location.

Packing would cost \$180, and the movers recommended bringing in library carts for packing items from the wall, which would save \$81.

The quote for the internal move, which would involve six movers, was \$205 per hour with a four-hour minimum, totaling \$820. A move to a new location was quoted as \$235 per hour with a 4 ½-hour minimum: a total of \$1,057.50.

The total cost for an internal move was quoted as \$1,000, and the total cost for an external move was \$1,237.50.