

Porter said Feb. 21 will mark his last day as a private physician. Porter, a life-long resident of Murphysboro, has maintained a practice for 31 years.

He said the "almost overwhelming demands" of "rising malpractice premiums, insurance limitations and guidelines, as well as the overhead and demands of a private practice" had forced his decision.

Porter said he hadn't been looking to leave his private practice, but when he got a call from Dr. Robert Holmes, administrative director for Choate Mental Health and Developmental Center in Anna, he began to consider the advantages of working for the state.

"The state's benefits package was good," he said. "They take care of my medical malpractice insurance. They provide health insurance, and now I'll have a dental plan." Porter said he weighed the benefits, the pay and the protection from the state against the independence he enjoyed with his own practice.

"Basically I've never worked for anyone else but myself," he said.

However, the malpractice insurance premiums he pays doubled last year. He pays more than \$20,000 a year just for the premium, he said. And that's not the only insurance woe.

Patients' insurance companies have become increasingly involved in making medical decisions, he said.

"They tell us when we can do CAT scans and when we can do MRIs and what specialists we can send our patients to and to what hospitals," he said.

What tipped the scales for him was the realization that his son and daughter-in-law, both fourth-year medical students, may not come to take over the family practice as he had hoped. He said they have chosen to go into different fields of medicine, and Murphysboro may not be in their game plan.

It was a difficult decision, he said. He has been in the same building with his family practice since 1977, and in that time, he has retained some of his original patients and in some cases, added on their children and even grandchildren.

The call from Choate, he said, came about six weeks ago, and he has known for two weeks that he was going to leave. He has declared Feb. 21 his last day, though he will see his last patient the preceding Friday. He said he almost doesn't want to come to work that day because he knows how hard it will be.

"Some of my patients will take it very hard," he said. "I'm taking it very hard."

Porter said malpractice issues have only become a serious problem for the medical community in the last two or three years. When he was a medical student and then a new doctor, malpractice

insurance was not an issue.

Porter was one of the Southern Illinois doctors who went to President George W. Bush's address in Collinsville on Jan. 5. He said he was thrilled to have seen the president, and noted that Bush has "lofty goals." Porter isn't certain those goals will be met.

"I'm not saying the trial lawyers are all wrong, I'm not saying the insurance companies are all wrong and I'm not saying the doctors are all wrong," he said. "Something has to change in all three areas. It's getting to be really hard now -- it's really a grind (to be a doctor)."

Porter said Dr. Chante Trinh will take over the private practice. His office staff, including Mary Brandenburg, PAC, will remain with Trinh, he said. Trinh has a special interest in geriatrics and practices internal medicine.

Porter said he hopes his patients will stay with Trinh, especially because the office staff can help make the transition between doctors easier for patients.

"He's a compassionate man and he know his medicine very well," Porter said of Trinh. "He's going to be a very good doctor."

Porter said he hasn't sat down for a conversation specifically about medical malpractice with Trinh. He said Trinh has been in the area for about six months, and seems very happy to get involved in his own practice.

He said his general advice for anyone considering a career in medicine is to go into it for love of the art, not for any visions of big money.

"You have to have a love of medicine," he said. "If you don't, you are probably doing the wrong thing. If you want to make a lot of money, it's not the right field."

Porter said he expects the next few weeks to be difficult as he sets aside the practice he has maintained for three decades. He said as his patients learn he is leaving, some of the good-byes will be hard to take.

"I would thank everyone for the wonderful years here and the pleasure of being their physician, coworker and colleague," he said in an open letter to the community. "As I begin a new chapter in my life, I will carry with me all the experiences, friendships and memories I have developed over the years."

Porter is a graduate of Eastern Illinois University and Kansas City College of Osteopathic Medicine. He began his practice in Christopher in 1974, then moved his practice to his home town of Murphysboro in 1975 when he began practicing with the Esposito-Rodriguez Clinic. He has also been an attending physician at St. Joseph Memorial Hospital and Jackson County Rehab and Care.

He has been a team physician at Murphysboro High School, and a board member at St. Joseph Memorial Hospital, Jackson County Health Department, Illinois Osteopathic Association, Southern Illinois Healthcare and Peer Review Organizations.

A reception to bid Porter farewell and to introduce Trinh will be held at Porter's office on Sixth Street in Murphysboro from 1 to 4 p.m. Feb. 19.