Locum Tenens

Then and Now

When CompHealth first pioneered the concept of locum tenens (temporary physician staffing) in the late 1970s, it became characterized as a way to practice medicine that was somewhat off the beaten career path, with most opportunities in remote locations and small “town doctor” practices.

Back then, that was a pretty accurate generalization. But today, locum tenens is a highly respected practice alternative that offers physicians a full spectrum of professional opportunities, in every type of practice across the U.S.

It's become an especially attractive alternative for new physicians because it allows you to:

• Gain real-world experience and build skills.
• See the full spectrum of practice options and locations, and make informed decisions about which are right for you.
• Get an insider’s view of practice management and economics without the pressure.
• Take some time off to travel or pursue interests outside of medicine.
• Fill in the gap between residency and fellowship.
• Make valuable contacts.
• Pay off medical school loans before making more financial commitments.
• Locate the perfect permanent opportunity.

What to Look For

If locum tenens interests you, your first step is to find a reputable firm to help you find opportunities and coordinate your work assignments. As you evaluate groups, be sure to ask questions about what they can offer you with regard to the following:

• Number and variety of opportunities. Do they offer work in one area or all across the country? How many opportunities do they currently have in your specialty? What kind and variety of work settings do they offer? How many physicians are currently working with them? Who are their clients?

• Knowledge of your specialty. Do they have a division dedicated to placing physicians in your specialty? Do they understand specific requirements, certifications, etc. that apply to you?

• Malpractice coverage. Do they cover physicians under a comprehensive policy at no charge?

• Licensing services. Do they coordinate new licensure for you and pay all fees?

• Risk management. Do they have risk management professionals available to you?

• Travel. Do they coordinate and pay for all of your travel expenses? What kind of housing do they provide? Do they offer personal travel service as well?

• Compensation. How will you be paid – hourly, daily, weekly? Will you be paid extra for overtime and call duties? Do they provide tax services including withholding and deferment? Will you be paid on a regular schedule, or only after the firm receives payment from the client?

• Credentialing. Do they credential physicians to recognized national standards? Is their credentialing service certified by a recognized agency?

• Physician support. Do they offer 24-hour support services? Can you reach someone on the weekends if you have a problem?

• Industry reputation. How long has the firm been in business? Will they give you the names of physicians in your specialty to contact?

• Permanent option. Does the firm offer you the option to convert a locum tenens job to permanent? Will they facilitate the placement for you?

• Bonuses. Do they offer bonuses for referrals and length of service? What other special bonuses or benefits do they offer?

• Pre-work interview. Will they coordinate a telephone interview with the client prior to your locum tenens assignments so you can ask questions and make an informed decision about whether or not to accept?

Just as with searching for a permanent job, it’s always best to ask a lot of questions when contacting locum tenens agencies to make sure you understand all terms, services, and expectations up front. Choosing the right agency can make all the difference in the experience you will have as a locum tenens physician.