

State of the Locum Market

An Independent Approach to Understanding the
Locum Tenens Industry and Celebrating Its Providers



Barton Associates

The Locum Tenens Experts[®]

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Overview

Locum tenens, a latin term meaning “holding the place,” is a \$3.9 billion industry that is projected to reach \$6.2, billion in the next 5 years, but not much is known about the providers behind this temporary work. We know it’s an attractive option for medical professionals to gain clinical experience, access increased career flexibility and avoid burnout... but *how did they discover locum tenens? Why did they choose to pursue this work? What keeps them involved? Is travel really the primary motivation?*

To better understand the industry, the locums, and the providers who have not yet explored this career path, Barton Associates initiated the General Locum Survey in early 2019.

It is the goal of this publication to be an independent approach to the state of the locum tenens market, a valuable resource for students, healthcare providers and staffing agencies nationwide. The survey did not ask questions about Barton Associates, nor any provider’s experience with a Barton recruiter, nor any other staffing agency or specialist.

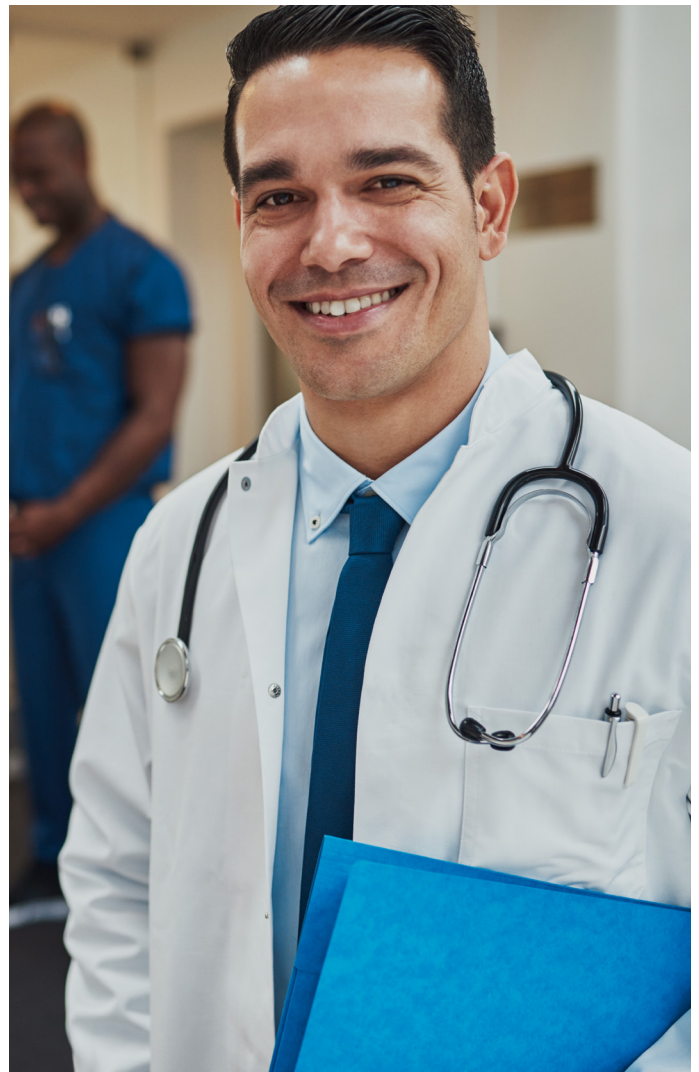
Rather, the General Locum Survey sought to answer how they learned about this career path, why they started, the best and worst parts about locum tenens, and more.

Read on to learn about the state of the locum market, and suggestions for improving the recruiting methods and staffing experience across all staffing agencies in the United States.

Methodology

Barton Associates’ 2019 General Locum Survey is based on surveys sent via email to physicians, NPs, PAs, CRNAs and dentists nationwide.

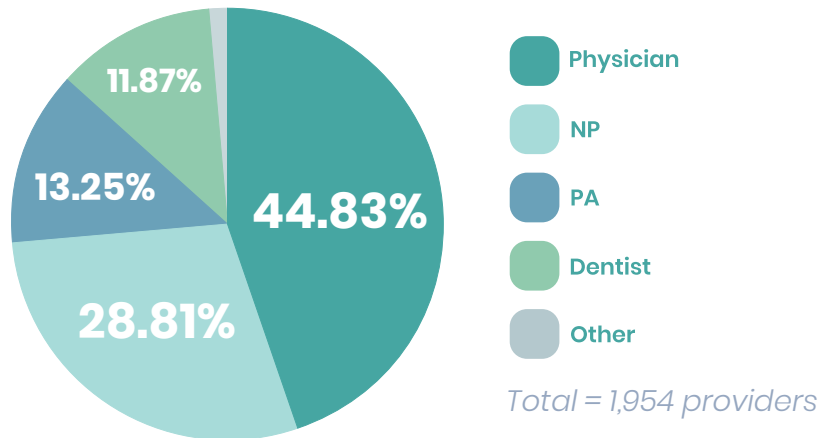
The survey was conducted throughout June and into July of 2019, during which time surveys were emailed to a proprietary lists of aforementioned providers, either known to practice on a temporary basis or known to be retired, work full-time or otherwise not participate in locum tenens work. Respondents were self-selected, and chose to participate of their own volition. Respondents who completed the survey in its entirety were entered for the chance to win a monetary prize.



Part I: Learning About Locum Tenens

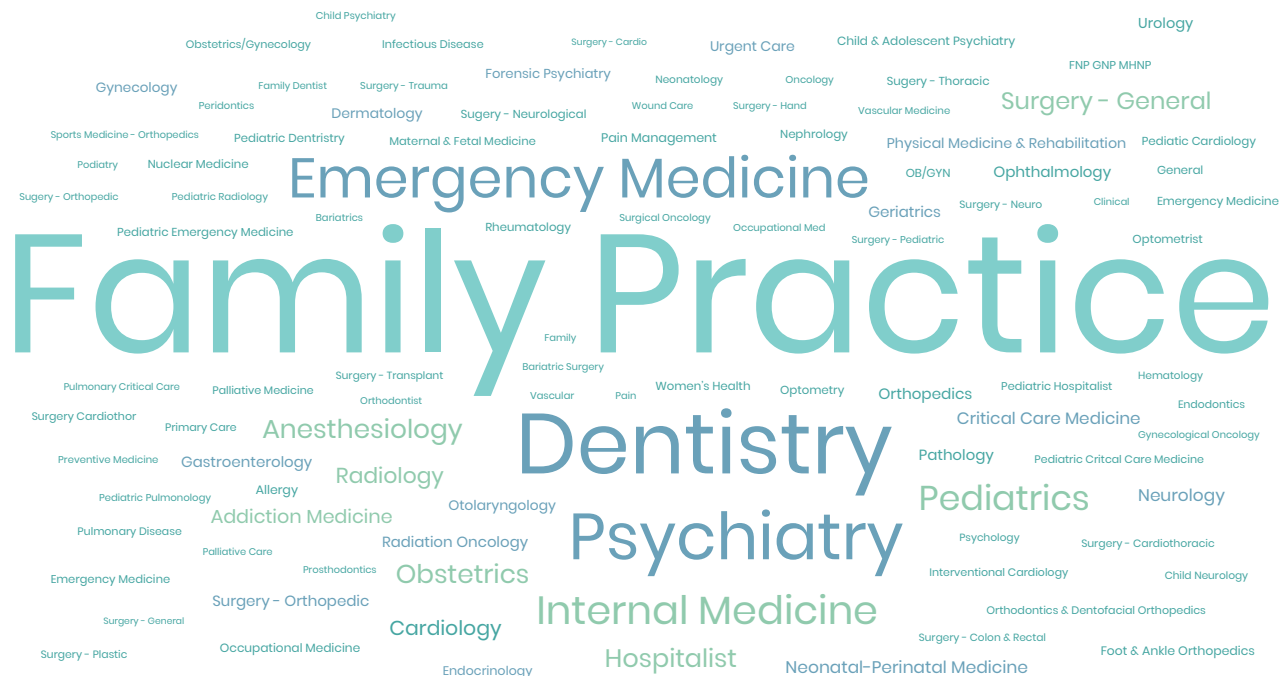
Of the 1,954 respondents to Barton Associates' General Locum Survey, 53.68% had taken a locum tenens assignment before. Of those that had never taken an assignment, 90.84% were familiar with this career path and 76.12% expressed an interest in trying locum work.

Of the 1,954 total respondents, regardless of locum history or not:



*Respondent Demographics
Source: 2019 General Locum Survey*

Of these respondents, 26.46% specialize in family practice, 8.34% in psychiatry, and 7.01% in emergency medicine. More than 115 specialties (across all provider types) were represented in this survey respondent group.



According to our respondents **who considered themselves locum providers**, the most popular way to learn about locum tenens as a viable career path was through a colleague (29.63%).

The next most likely source of learning about locum tenens was either through a direct Internet search (25.75%) or an ad/email (24.35%). Locum tenens providers were least likely to learn from friends and family (5.5%) and in school (5.39%).



*How Locums Learned About Locum Tenens
Total: 928*

For providers **who have not taken an assignment before**, the most popular ways to learn about locum tenens was also from a colleague (27.03%), followed by a direct internet search (26.74%) and an ad/email (20.38%).

A recruiting agency resulted as the least impactful with 1.62% of respondents citing them as the source of this information.



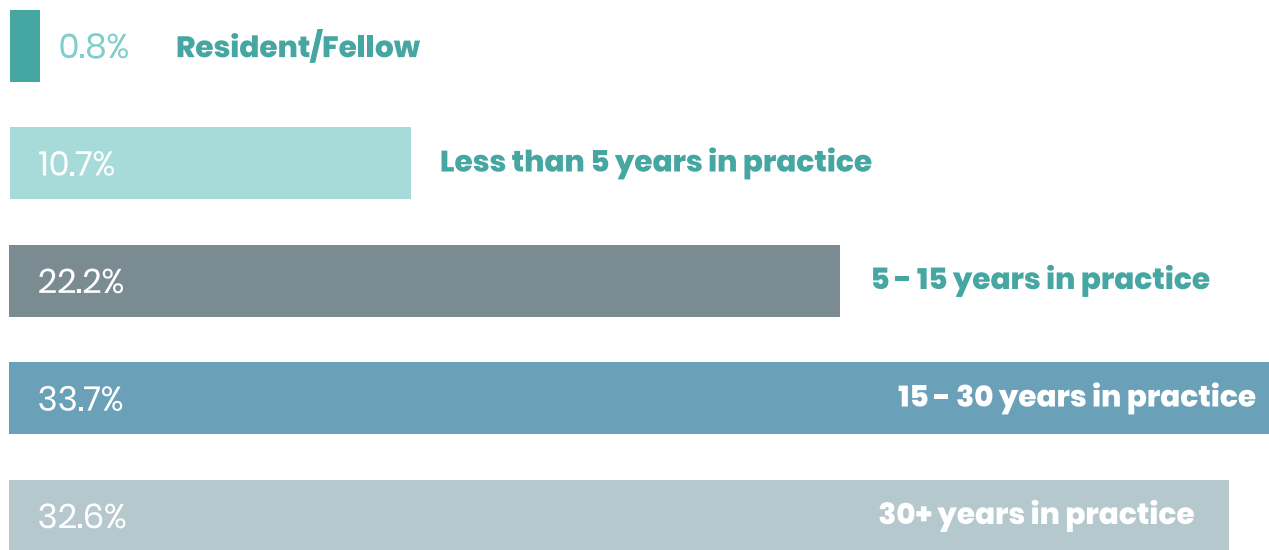
*How Non-Locums Learned About Locum Tenens
Total: 680*

Part II: Locum Providers

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 1,049 self-identified locum tenens providers surveyed, the vast majority (52.62%) were physicians. 21.7% were NPs, followed by 12.87% dentists and 11.25% PAs. General practitioners and CRNAs were also represented in this survey respondent group.

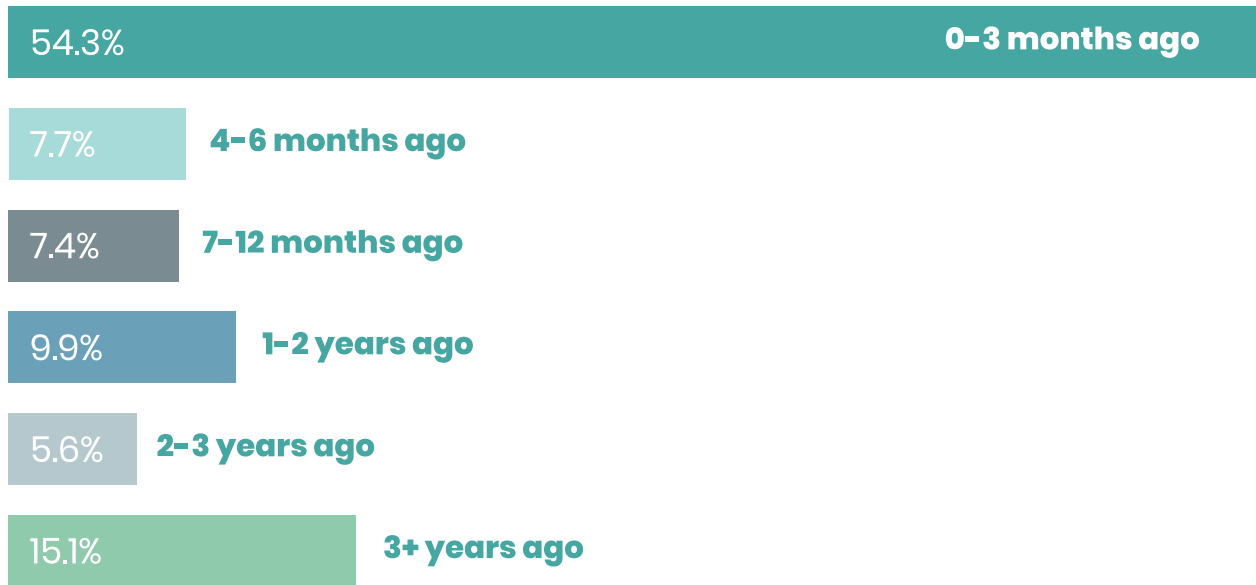
These locum providers, including physicians, NPs, PAs, CRNAs, dentists and general practitioners, were most likely to have more than 15 years in practice (66.30%). Only 11.5% of providers who had ever taken an assignment had less than 5 years in practice.



Locum Providers: Experience Level
Source: 2019 General Locum Survey
Total = 1,000

A total of 22.74% of General Locum Survey respondents consider themselves a “full-time locum”, with an additional 45.05% saying they use locum for part-time income or while “semi-retired” (25.22% and 19.83% respectively).

Of those surveyed, an astounding 54.30% had completed a locum assignment within the last three months. Even further, nearly 70% stated that they took an assignment within the last year (69.4%).



*Locum Providers: Most Recent Assignment
Source: 2019 General Locum Survey
Total = 1,000*

These 1,049 locum respondents averaged **20 completed assignments** over their career, with contracts lasting a day to over a year. Some respondents have only completed a single assignment, while others have easily completed more than 100.



REASONS FOR STARTING LOCUM WORK

What comes to mind when you think of locum tenens work? Avoiding burnout, travelling more, and earning competitive pay are valid answers. But, for our respondents? The reason they started on this career path can be pin-pointed to the ability to control their schedules (48.17%).

The next most popular reasons for pursuing temporary work were: to pursue greater earning potential (42.13%), travel (34.16%) and to keep their skills sharp (32.44%). Our surveyed locums were least likely to start this work to fill the gaps between permanent jobs (4.63%).



**Control of
schedule**

48.17%



**Greater earning
potential**

42.13%



Travel
34.16%



**Keep their
skills sharp**

32.44%

*Why Did You Originally Start Locum Work?
Source: 2019 General Locum Survey
Total: 928*

Of note, a group of respondents unknowingly gave similar answers regarding the ability to meet new people, explore new locations, and work with different cultures throughout the nation. The ability to work with “all kinds of care-givers and patient cultures” and to provide “service to rural populations” were two predominant reasons providers cited for initiating this career path.

Seeing new settings, new patient problems and applying their skills at new hospitals systems - or struggling practices - were experiences our locum respondents were very proud to share, setting goals to make a difference in peoples' lives, coworkers and patients alike.

WHY THEY CONTINUE

With an average of twenty completed assignments across more than 1,000 locum tenens providers, it was prudent to understand if the intrinsic (freedom) and extrinsic (financial gain) benefits of locum tenens work remained the same throughout the provider's career path, or if their motivations are entirely misunderstood.

Most surprisingly, the reasons why locums begin this career path are the same reasons they continue. The highest response rate cited control of schedule as the primary motivator for staying in this field (45.52%).

Next, locums continue to pursue greater earning potential (42.29%), keep their skills sharp (34.84%), and travel (30.74%). Our survey respondents are less likely to seek locum employment as a way to maintain their licenses (16.72%).



**Control of
schedule**

45.52%



**Greater earning
potential**

42.29%



**Keep their
skills sharp**

32.84%



Travel
30.74%

*Why Do You Continue to Do Locum Work?
Source: 2019 General Locum Survey
Total: 927*

A breakout group of respondents cited a greater good for the reason they continue this labor of service. The ability to work “both for money and do my humanitarian work”, combining work with charitable activities either stateside or internationally was a common thread.

Similarly, respondents cited the greater good of being a healthcare provider as their primary motivation, stating they had a “responsibility” in the face of the shortage in their respective disciplines to use their specialized training to care for patients near and far.

BEST & WORST PARTS ABOUT LOCUM WORK

According to the locum tenens providers who answered the 2019 General Locum Survey, the best parts of this career path are the competitive pay (27.72%), the ability to control their schedules (25.89%) and travel (14.67%), and avoiding the office politics common in permanent roles (13.59%).



Competitive pay
27.72%



Control of schedule
25.89%



Travel
14.67%



Avoiding office politics
13.59%

Pros of Locum Work
Source: 2019 General Locum Survey
Total: 927

Interestingly, these survey respondents provided further open response answers that surprised us: some locum tenens providers chose the lack of overhead (i.e. avoiding the “administrative hassle” of time and money spent on day-to-day management, paperwork and billing) and the sense of duty in this role as the best parts of locum work.

Our respondents noted that locum work was great for new graduates seeking experience outside of their rural hometown with few opportunities and grandparents seeking to “maintain [their] skills” while supplementing income and raising grandchildren, while others stated that locum work was the best way to discover the “practice more compatible with [their] lifestyle and goals”.

Others cite that everyone should work locum tenens assignments part-time, in addition to their permanent roles, and others believe this path is the greatest solution to providing income to start a private practice. The freedom that comes with this career path is clear, allowing extra income, new experiences, and the ability to take time off or work when it makes sense for the individual provider.

Alternatively, the worst parts of a locum tenens career were cited as travel (27.62%), frequent credentialing and/or licensing (24.16%), and the insecurity about different experiences (10.14%).

Also of note were the lack of benefits associated with being an independent contractor: needing to file taxes differently, track their expenses, and find their own health insurance, if not covered under a spouse or family member (9.49%).



Travel
27.62%



**Frequent
credentialing
and licensing**
24.16%



**Insecurity about
different
experiences**
10.14%



**Lack of
benefits**
9.49%

Cons of Locum Work
Source: 2019 General Locum Survey
Total: 927

Part III: Permanent Providers

Reflect on Locum Tenens

Of the 1,954 total survey respondents, 905 (46.32%) had never taken a locum tenens assignment. Of those permanent (or non-locum) respondents, 90.84% knew what locum tenens is, with only 9.16% unfamiliar with this career path.

That means, of our total survey respondents, 95.42% of providers know what locum tenens is!

Opposite the aforementioned locum tenens providers, who were most likely to have more than 15 years experience, these non-locum respondents were **more** likely to have **less** than 15 years in practice (54.5%). These permanent (non-locum) providers were also most likely to be physicians (35.80%) or NPs (37.02%).

Of the 813 who knew about locum tenens but had not yet tried it, an astounding 76.12% expressed an interest in trying an assignment.

Reasons they had not yet tried locum work included: already having a permanent role (28.74%) and the belief that there are no locum roles for their specialties (12%). Additionally, our respondents cited family as the reason why they have not pursued this work (9.48%) and their unwillingness to travel (5.63%).

Responses of note cited lack of continuity in patient care, lack of desire to get new licenses, being retired, or lack of stability in work as reasons they had no desire to try locum work.

Based on this data, most permanent providers know what locum tenens **is**, but not how it actually **works**.

Myth

Reality

I can't do locum work because that means leaving my kids, family, pets at home.



Locum tenens staffing agencies strive to make the travel process smooth and headache-free, assisting in any way we can to help our providers feel at home on assignment - including bringing your loved ones.

Locum tenens assignments aren't available for my speciality.



Providers of all ages, specializations, and experience levels thrive as locum tenens professionals, and for a variety of reasons. Don't see what you're looking for? Just ask!

I'll have to travel all the time.



As a locum tenens provider, you choose when you work, how long the assignment is, and how far you're willing to travel. You have full control over your work-life schedule.

I can't keep my full-time job if I pursue locum assignments.



You can take short-term, temporary assignments for some extra spending money, in addition to your permanent role. This opens the door for extra income, expanded professional networks, and a change of scene - all without leaving your full-time job.

I can't do locum work because I'm retired.



Many locum tenens providers choose this career path to be "semi-retired" and keep their licenses active. For established healthcare veterans, locum tenens offers you a self-directed schedule and financial stability into retirement.

I'll be paid less as a locum.



Providers of all specialties credit higher earning potential as a primary motivator for exploring and staying within the locum tenens career path.

People only do locum work when they can't find a "normal" job.



Locum tenens is a career choice. Many professionals choose to work as locum tenens providers for many reasons, including excellent pay, flexibility to work where and when they choose, and the ability to gain experience in a variety of practice areas and settings.

Credentialing is such a headache.



Dedicated recruiters and credentialing team members are there every step of the way to take care of everything you need. They're here to make the process as easy as possible.

Conclusion

Upon review of the 1,954 responses we received, we discovered that many of the broad assumptions around locum tenens were confirmed by this study. The primary use cases regarding why providers pursue this path, including control of schedule and better pay, among others, validated our assumptions about why healthcare providers would seek locum tenens as a career option.

It was also validated that these reasons do not change over time, and locum tenens delivers on its promise of why providers initially start the process of taking short and long-term assignments in communities near and far. While providers pursue different reasons as their primary motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, their reasons for becoming locum providers does not discredit the valuable work they do nationwide.

Similarly, upon review of the 905 responses by non-locum providers, many of the broad assumptions about why providers choose not to participate in, or hesitate from doing, locum tenens work were also confirmed by this survey. Reasons cited in this survey, including disinterest in travel and fear of lack of benefits, reinforce the assumed reasons, preconceived notions, and possible stereotypes surrounding locum work. These reasons are valid and not entirely untrue, but there are also available means to work around them, if desired.

While it is difficult to travel with young children, a sample reason provided by our respondents, that fact alone should not hinder providers from seeking locum tenens as a career path or supplement to their income. Simply, all of the provided reasons for *choosing not to pursue locum work do not guarantee the inability to do locum work*. Rather, there are valid work-arounds available, when the provider is able to connect with a dedicated recruiter and outline their needs, goals, expectations, and fears.

In summary, it was clear that every experience is different, because every provider is different.

Travel was the third top reason for starting and continuing locum tenens work – but travel also ranked as the number one pain point for providers as well. Similarly, survey respondents mentioned that quick credentialing was their favorite part – and yet it was also the number two pain point for locum respondents.

Further, locum tenens providers cited learning new systems and adapting to new environments (and joining uncomfortable office situations) was their second and third least favorite parts – and yet, at the same time, exploring new experiences was in the top five reasons this group of 1,049 locum respondents pursued their career path originally.

Simply, hospitals, practices, and facilities across the nation can learn that not all locum tenens providers are in this career path for the same reason. Similarly, it would benefit staffing and recruiting agencies to understand their providers on the individual level, understanding their unique personal needs and professional goals prior to submitting or placing them on assignments, and keeping the quality of those relationships stable across all assignments, so locum providers do not experience as many ups and downs when taking a new contract, extending a current assignment, or travelling to a new location.

For locum tenens providers, it is advisable to realize that all credentialing processes take varying amounts of time and paperwork, and no single travel experience is definitive of the entire locum tenens experience. Agencies have credentialing departments to assist in this process - take advantage of their expertise. Your agency will also have a travel department available to help book travel and handle unexpected roadblocks, such as cancelled flights or less-than-stellar lodging.

You are encouraged to communicate actively with your recruiter, and to be very specific about your personal preferences and professional goals. Be the best self-advocate, and speak up when something goes poorly, but don't forget to celebrate when it goes smoothly. It is the goal of clients and agencies to make your experience worthwhile, so don't take those little moments for granted and always remember what inspired you to enter the field originally.

You have the power to mould this career path into what you want it to be - use that influence to guide what assignments you take, which states you travel to, and ultimately, how locum tenens can elevate your life-long career.

For those that haven't done locum work yet, one of the biggest reasons cited for not pursuing this career path is that they are still looking for their opportunities and are hindered by the time it takes to find them. Otherwise, respondents who had never taken a locum assignment are simply comfortable with their full-time positions.

To better the process of finding assignments for potential locum tenens providers, it would behoove agencies and clients who hire locum tenens providers to better explain the options available to healthcare providers, and properly describe the expectations of the assignment when advertising their openings.

As revealed in this 2019 General Locum Survey, there are locum tenens opportunities for all levels of experience, from new graduates to healthcare providers with more than 20 years' experience. In fact, according to this survey, 11% of providers who had taken an assignment had less than 5 years in practice. While most facilities often prefer an experienced provider, there are some willing to work with locums of all levels of experience, making this career path viable for those seeking to try different specialities, build out their CVs, or lock in their first job after graduation.

Regardless of their reasons for deciding to pursue a career in locum tenens, or continuing to explore their options before leaping into this career path, one thing is certain: short and long-term locum providers make a tremendous impact on the healthcare industry. Whether they're filling in for a sick provider or choosing to work in underserved areas, locum tenens providers help guarantee continuity of care, with little-to-no disruption, to patients across the country.



About Barton Associates

Founded in 2001, Barton Associates is a nationwide leader in the locum tenens staffing industry. Barton offers broad staffing support for physicians, NPs, PAs, dentists and CRNAs, in a wide range of specialties.

Barton Associates provides nationwide support from offices in Massachusetts, Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, New Hampshire, Nevada and Texas. Our experienced team includes 800+ recruiters, account managers, licensors, credentialers and other healthcare staffing professionals.

Barton Associates now covers all time zones! Our team is available to you 24 hours a day, six days a week. Contact a Barton representative to find your next job or candidate.



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