

EXCLUSIVE! Locum Tenens - Not Your Conventional Employment

Locum Tenens, the Latin term meaning "one holding a place," and which essentially translates to the effective utilization of available, qualified healthcare professionals to deliver patient care on an interim basis, defines a time-honored concept which holds significant advantages for American dentists. Introduced to U.S. dentists on an organized basis in 1983, Locum Tenens is just now beginning a wider acceptance across the country as its effectiveness and applications are becoming known. (In the U.S., dentistry has been slower than medicine and other disciplines to adopt the concept due largely to an unfounded fear that patients will relate to one caregiver to the exclusion of all others.)

Having an option to practice your profession on your own terms of time and commitment, with the flexibility to plan work around family or other priorities has a value that cannot be measured in conventional terms. Indications are that our workforce in general is beginning to value quality of lifestyle over maximum revenue. The added advantage of working without financial obligation or investment (especially true for financially burdened graduates), while learning different practice approaches and experiencing a variety of office settings, also has intangible value.

For those unfamiliar with Locum Tenens and its practical application to dentistry, the following specifics may be helpful:

Who is Eligible?

One must be currently licensed in any state from which a host office requests service and possess a current DEA number. Some service providers are multi-state licensed, but most live and work in the same state. Independent contractors make themselves available from several weeks or months at a time to indefinitely, depending upon their individual needs. Locum Tenens, for example, can serve as a very functional bridge from one activity to another, such as part of an exit strategy, a geographical move, a transition from military/institution to civilian, or a desired change in practice activity level. Locum Tenens can serve as a very functional bridge from one activity to another. Then again, others have found the flexible, low-stress lifestyle to have long term benefits over a number of years.

How Does it Work?

Typically, a dentist who wishes to take time away from the office or who is faced with an emergency absence will contact an experienced Locum Tenens service for assistance. The service then makes an appropriate match from its database and contacts the selected Independent Contractor. A potential contractor will be supplied with comprehensive specifics of the practice opportunity to determine its desirability. (There is no obligation on behalf of a contractor to accept any assignment.) If an assignment is accepted, the parties are put in contact and the service provides administrative support until the assignment is completed. Fees are paid by the client/host to the service, which then pays the contractor, both according to prearranged contractual guarantees.

The service provider (contractor) is responsible for treating patients only. Administration of the practice is an obligation of the client office, with payment of fees and necessary negotiations handled by experienced service staff.

Prior to being offered a practice opportunity, a contractor participates in a thorough interview process. During this time, instruction is given regarding the nuances of interim care and the issues faced when substituting for another professional.

Elective assignments usually run from one to three weeks. Non-elective or emergency coverages understandably are longer, from several weeks to several months. If an assignment becomes too long, more than one service provider may be utilized.

What is the earning potential?

A reasonably experienced general dentist, working a 28-32-hour, four day week, can expect to earn \$2000-2500 per week, plus mileage and lodging costs as applicable, assuming the contractor is affiliated with a recognized and experienced Locum Tenens Company. Revenue is calculated on the greater of an hourly rate or percentage of production. Earnings will vary with different assignments and from one area of the country to another. Overall, they are generally quite competitive. (Practice ownership or other long-term commitments of course, can realize higher gains). In a state with an active Locum

Tenens service, a contractor may typically work as many weeks per year as desired.

Summary

Locum Tenens is a longstanding concept, which has been shown to be well-suited to dentistry and to general dentistry in particular. Although there are many clinicians who require considerable regimentation and predictable order, the flexibility inherent in Locum Tenens clinical care may be ideal for certain sections of our dental workforce, depending upon various career decisions, circumstances and their timing. For more information contact Forest Irons & Associates, Inc. 800-433-2603 or forestirons.com.

***Dr Forest Irons is a general dentist, former dental educator and practice owner. He is president of Forest Irons & Associates, Inc., a Locum Tenens service company exclusively for dentists. The company was started in North Carolina in 1983 and currently serves thirty-eight states and Canada.**