

Locum Tenens

Locum Tenens is a Latin term for filling in for or temporarily taking the place of another provider. Locum tenens fills the temporary, inevitable gaps in services caused by recruiting emergencies or understaffing problems, new facility needs, emergency or unexpected absences, vacation and holidays and seasonal fluctuations in patient volume.

A Locum Tenens provider can work directly with a practice or medical facility or through a Locum Tenens agency. Why would a facility or practice use a locum tenens agency? And why would a midwife want to be an independent contractor for an agency?

Benefits for medical facilities and practices include thoroughly credentialed providers & expedited privileges; cost effective staffing solutions; increased patient flow and billable time; reduced stress due to understaffing; and the ability to maintain revenue streams and client base.

Benefits for providers include extra income; professional liability insurance coverage; the ability to schedule a practice around a family and lifestyle; the travel benefits of a “working vacation”; opportunities to sample diverse clinical settings; and the chance to build a unique set of practice skills. In addition, most expenses are arranged and paid for as part of the package, and locum tenens work may lead to a permanent opportunity. Opportunities are varied, from hospitals, medical centers and other health care facilities to solo, group or multi-specialty practices. Locum tenens providers are housed in hotels, inns, or apartments, on a temporary basis for the length of the assignment.

What is the difference between locum tenens and a permanent position?

Depending on what type of permanent position locum tenens work is compared to, there may be some significant differences between locum tenens work and a permanent position. Locum tenens providers are independent contractors. Locum tenens providers can work as few as 2 hours per week, or as many as 168. Hours vary according to assignment needs. While permanent providers are expected to have a vested interest in improving continuity of care, in-house procedures, departmental changes, politics, and the like, locum tenens providers are expected to fit into the department as it is, adapting themselves instead of trying to make changes to the working environment.

How does Locum Tenens Work?

A practice needing a temporary midwife may post an ad or use an agency; a CNM/CM desiring locum tenens work may respond to a locum tenens job posting on midwifejobs.com or another site, *or* an agency recruiter might contact the midwife.

Midwives seeking locum tenens work with an agency will complete an application, providing credentials, education, professional work experience and other background information. The agency submits the candidate’s application to their risk management department and their liability carrier in order to obtain approval for work. Once approval is obtained, the recruiter can offer opportunities in line with the candidate’s interest, availability, and other requirements and negotiate assignment terms with the client. The CNM/CM must have active licensure in the state in which the job occurs (unless the placement is within a federal facility such as an Indian Health Service site) and may also need to complete facility or practice credentialing paperwork. The agency usually *provides and arranges* liability coverage, travel, transportation, and lodging, if needed.

The CNM/CM arrives on-site, works the assignment, and turns in work calendars and expense sheets. The agency uses these calendars to pay the midwife, to charge the client, and as a record to report liability insurance hours to the insurance carrier. The client handles all patient billing.

Why use an agency?

The agency acts as an advocate in all matters pertaining to the assignment, negotiating terms and facilitating credentialing. Agencies have access to many more opportunities and clients, including government openings, on a daily basis, and often have long-standing relationships with clients/hospitals/practices. Some positions can only be obtained via an agency because some clients prefer to hire agencies that can pre-screen candidates, to save time & energy.

Why would a midwife choose to work as a locum tenens?

Current malpractice trends and the demand for more specialists have created a serious shortage of Ob/Gyn health care providers nationwide. By working as locum tenens providers, midwives help patients as well as colleagues during this time of urgent need.

CNMs/CMs may use locum tenens assignments as trial periods to determine a good fit for permanent positions, to try out the facilities, responsibilities, and personalities of the position before committing long term. CNMs/CMs who work locum tenens act as emissaries for the midwifery specialty, contributing to the community at large and increasing good will. It is fairly standard practice for agencies to pay for or reimburse costs, and to facilitate licensing in states where they have open positions. Many CNMs consider that quite an advantage.

What are the drawbacks of locum tenens work?

Locum tenens providers are there to alleviate understaffing, or to fill in for vacation or an emergency. This may mean that the work environment is less than perfect; requiring flexibility, understanding, and the ability to adjust and cope under a variety of circumstances, with a variety of people and personalities. As an independent contractor, you are responsible for paying your own taxes and any benefits (ie. workman's compensation or health insurance.) There are, however, business-related deductions.

What to look out for...

- Choose a *reputable* locum tenens agency.
- Make sure your agency representative gives you enough practice/facility details so that you can make an informed decision.
- Get the assignment terms *in writing* and make sure that you are comfortable with those terms.
- Make sure you get a copy of the certificate of insurance before the assignment starts and that it includes *written* stipulation of responsibility for tail coverage, if it is a claims made policy.

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The ACNM "QuickInfo" series was developed by the Department of Professional Services to respond to common inquiries, summarizing ACNM resources regarding a particular topic, as well as listing selected literature and a variety of other resources. Your feedback is welcomed; contact Professional Services at (240) 485-1800 or info@acnm.org.

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