Introduction to locum tenens

Challenges of locum tenens

Benefits of locum tenens

Locum tenens usage by healthcare organizations

Reasons why healthcare organizations hire locums

Locum tenens quality of care

Centralization as a locum tenens management strategy

How healthcare organizations are managing locum tenens

Credentialing issues

Managing multiple locum tenens providers

Locum tenens cost vs. lack of coverage

Why do healthcare organizations hire locums?

The effort associated with managing multiple providers is also cited as a challenge of locum tenens by 20% of respondents. Many are using locum tenens as an agile way to quickly scale their facilities for high-demand medical conditions for medical staff. Facilities are turning to locum tenens especially for high-demand medical specialties. In 2023, 82% of surveyed healthcare facilities said their top priority was to fill an open permanent position. To meet increased patient demand, 25% of facilities are using locum tenens to provide coverage while actively recruiting for an open permanent position. To help mitigate burnout and reduce staff workload, 67% of facilities are using locum tenens providers as a resource that can make the request to that single point of contact who helps them get the locum tenens provider they need.

A CHG Healthcare study found that half of healthcare organizations used locum tenens providers to help reduce burnout among existing staff. The level of concern was highest in specialties such as surgeons, ED physicians, and subspecialists. Locum tenens usage is growing. More than 10,000 physicians work temporary locum tenens assignments in the U.S. annually, who treat more than 11 million patients. Current estimates indicate that about 52,000 physicians work temporary locum tenens assignments in the U.S. annually, who treat more than 11 million patients. One of the ways large healthcare organizations are coping with the administrative burden of recruiting and managing multiple locum providers is by centralizing their locum tenens services. One survey found that 82% of healthcare organizations said they use some sort of centralization or group model for managing locum tenens. The benefits of centralization include making the request to that single point of contact who helps them get the locum tenens provider they need.

Despite the common concern about the quality of patient care, patients treated by locums had a lower treatment cost compared to those treated by employed providers. One study found that patients treated by locums had a lower treatment cost compared to those treated by employed providers. Additionally, the difference in quality of care between those treated by locums and employed providers was not statistically significant. Patients treated by locums reported overall satisfaction with their care that was comparable to those treated by employed providers. Locum tenens usage continues to grow. In 2023, 42% of healthcare organizations used locum tenens providers to help reduce burnout among existing staff. The level of concern was highest in specialties such as surgeons, ED physicians, and subspecialists.

Rural locum tenens usage

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Healthcare organizations continue to increase their use of locums. Nearly half (46%) of organizations reported an increase in locum tenens utilization in 2022 over the prior year, while 32% reported a 20% increase. (See Table 1 for additional details.)

According to AAPPR, nearly half (46%) of physicians indicated they use locum tenens more often as a solution to staff shortages, while 40% report using it less. Thirty-two percent of physicians indicate they use locums telehealth full time as a part-time job, and 30% are interested in locums telehealth as a full-time job.

The flexibility of locums in filling coverage gaps or quickly adjusting staffing levels to current levels of locum tenens use in 2024.

A majority of healthcare organizations (56%) expect to increase or maintain their 2024 locum tenens forecast. Only 29% reported a decrease in usage in 2022 compared to the prior year, while 15% stayed about the same. Only 20% reported an increase in locum tenens usage in 2022.

Top 5 priorities rated “more important” in 2023 vs. 2022

In addition to the growing provider shortage, high turnover is making it challenging to keep departments fully staffed. Specialty divisions with the most recent turnover are orthopedic surgery (32.6%) and gastroenterology (30.8%). The highest demand for locums in 2023 was for orthopedic surgery (36%), followed by psychiatry (14.9%) and primary care (12.8%).

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High staff turnover in healthcare

A majority of healthcare organizations (85%) expect to increase or maintain their current levels of locum tenens usage in 2022.

High provider interest in working telehealth combined with an industry shift toward virtual care and increased telehealth license availability has likely produced more telehealth locum tenens opportunities in 2023.

More than a third of physicians (37%) say they’re interested in working telehealth, while 30% are interested in locums telehealth full time. However, only 20% of physicians had the option to work telehealth as a side job, and 30% are interested in locums telehealth full time.

There is an ongoing interest in virtual visits and telehealth, but experience rapid growth, we have leaned heavily on locum tenens to help us deliver care to rural communities.”

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How many physicians are working locum tenens?

- **2023 Locum Tenens Awareness and Perception Study**

**Source:**
26% of the 2022 physician population (approx. 100,000) have worked locum tenens.

An estimated 7% of the available physician population (about 52,000) is working locums since 2015.

Physicians who require a visa to work in the United States constitute about 24% of the total physician population and are not normally eligible to work locums.

Currently worked locums in 2022, the total would be 51,873 physicians.

The salary is very appealing

Why do physicians work locum tenens?

- **Reasons physicians start working locum tenens**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To keep my experience current or my mind and skills sharp</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work while searching for a full-time position</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To control my own schedule</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid overwork and burnout</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see the country or world</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a Bridge to retirement</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get more time to provide quality patient care</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make a difference where healthcare is needed</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a bridge between training/residency/fellowship</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The salary is very appealing</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Methodology**

CHG Healthcare has contracted with the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) to survey its members to determine the level of locum tenens use in the United States. The survey does not include physicians who work solely through academic settings and training programs. In addition, it does not include the work of the foreign medical graduates (FMGs) who are eligible to work in the U.S. and work through FMPs. Therefore, the results should not be viewed as an exact representation of the total current locum tenens population in the U.S.

The results of the survey are not representative of the entire locum tenens provider population. They are representative of the providers who agreed to complete the survey, which may not be representative of the entire locum tenens provider population.